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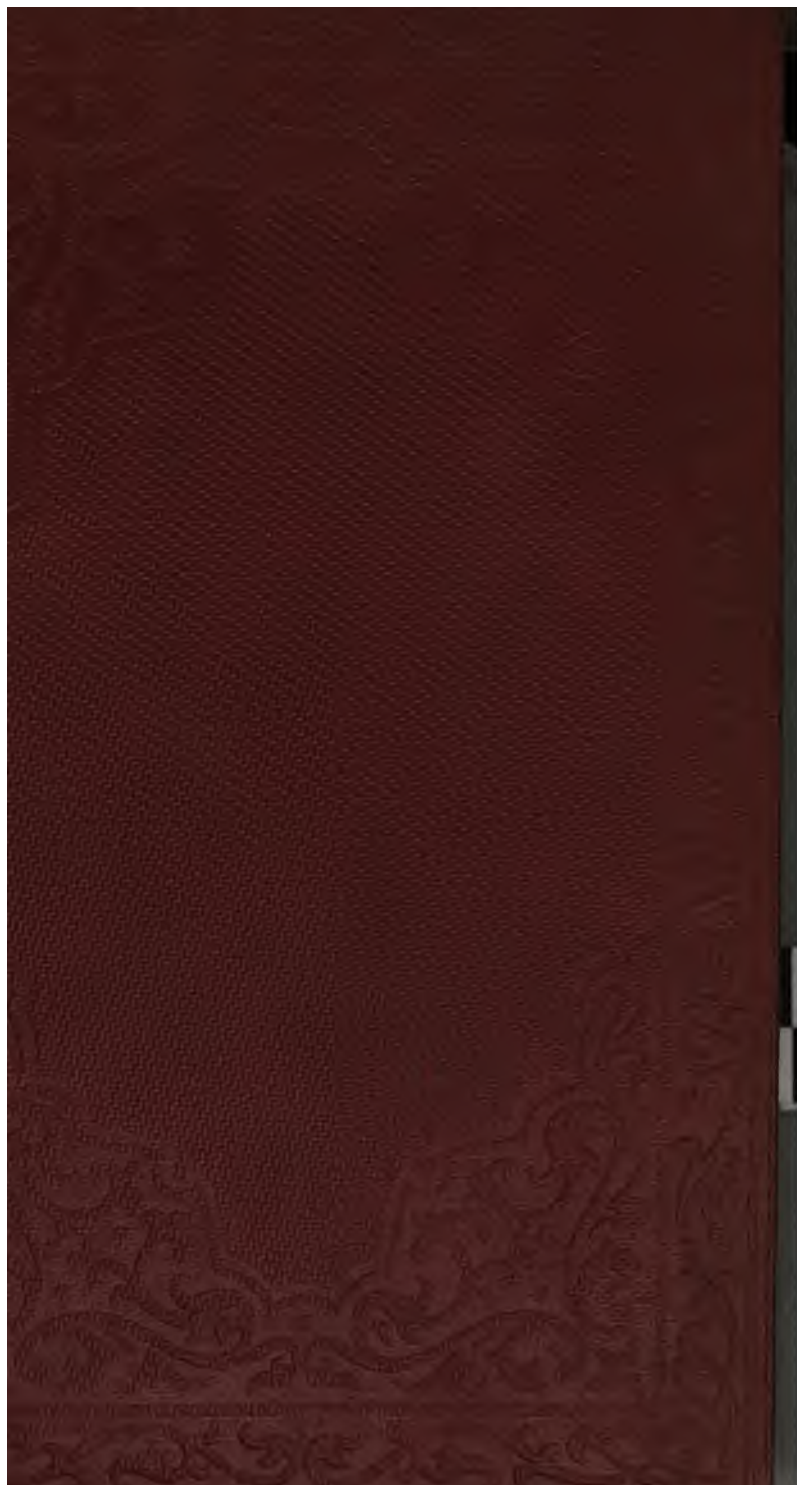
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CLARA;
OR,
SLAVE LIFE IN EUROPE.

With a Preface
BY SIR ARCHIBALD ALISON, BART.

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CLARA;

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CHAPTER I.

A DANGEROUS PAPER.

WE beg our reader will accompany us to the house of Dr. Edward Erichsen. It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon; the passage was filled with leather trunks and boxes, as if the family were going on a journey. We find the doctor in his study, leaning back in his arm-chair, not even noticing the games of his children, who were in the room with him; and yet their occupation was rather amusing to see. Oscar and Anna were sitting on the floor, and between them was a foot-stool, on which there was a sickly-looking little girl, whose astonished eyes stared constantly round the room. Her dress was comical enough. She had a

shabby blue woollen frock, and a little velvet cloak which Oscar had put on her shoulders, and on her head a pretty little lace bonnet, fastened on quite awry by Anna. The latter had a cup of coffee in her hand, with bread crumbled in it, which she was putting into the child's mouth with a spoon. Sometimes the little girl turned away her head, as if unable to swallow any more, and then Oscar and Anna both exclaimed at once : " Papa, the stranger child won't eat ! "

The little thing seemed by no means pleased with this cramming system and the too great attention shown her. She looked askance at her velvet cloak and lace bonnet, and fidgeted with her feet, as if meditating by a sudden spring to regain her freedom ; in short, she behaved like a little ape just caught and receiving its first lesson in polite behaviour.

The door opened, and Arthur appeared on the threshold, shaking his head as he looked into the room. " A pretty affair," said he, closing the door, and taking a chair near his brother. " For Heaven's sake tell me, Edward, is the story true ? And you said nothing of it yesterday ! I only heard it this morning at breakfast from Alphonse, who was talking it over with my mother in his usual fashion."

The doctor looked up, but did not change his position. " I was just going to tell you, Arthur,"

said he, in a voice which trembled, "my carriage is waiting."

"But tell me," said Arthur, urgently, "does she really not intend to return? My mother had given her a severe lecture, and she seemed to see how ill she had behaved."

"She *seemed*," answered Edward, shaking his head; "that is, she, as usual, made no answer; but when she left your house she wrote to me that she considered it better for us both that she should persevere in her resolution. There lies this strange document. I don't know whether Alphonse has any knowledge of it."

The painter read the letter, and, while doing so, glanced round at the group of children. He then folded it up, gave it back to his brother, and said, "Explain the affair to me. Is this the child she refers to?"

The doctor said: "Nothing can be more simple. You know the quarrel my wife and I had on Christmas-eve; next day she went to her mother, and the worthy lady, instead of persuading her daughter to return home, or at least coming herself, sent her man of business, saying she felt herself involved in her daughter's wrongs. On which I wrote a letter that really would have softened a heart of stone; then followed the conversation with my mother."

"Exactly so! But what is the story about the child? for so far as I have heard she is the fresh cause of all going wrong again."

"The explanation is easy enough; but when a person wishes to find cause for strife and suspicion, anything serves as a pretext. On the same memorable Christmas-eve I made the acquaintance, strangely enough, of an unfortunate girl in a deep decline, who had been robbed of her child by some wicked persons, now, however, restored to her. She was ill, friendless, and poor; so I visited her regularly, and supported her as well as I could."

"There surely was nothing wrong in that."

"She became every day worse; the child, too, seemed to pine, and when the mother died, a few days ago, I saw no harm in bringing it home with me, intending to keep it here till I could find some one with whom I could place it. Was I wrong?"

"Not in our eyes, or in those of any right thinking person," answered Arthur; "but you might have foreseen that your kind action would give a welcome handle to those who wished to find one. Anonymous letters were sent to your wife, I heard?"

"They were, and you cannot imagine of what a malicious and wicked nature. The writer said it was a connexion which had been going on for

years, well known to every one, but concealed hitherto from my wife to spare her feelings."

"Oh! shameful, shameful!"

"The faithful friend who addressed her could no longer be silent, and see an unhappy woman so shamefully imposed upon and betrayed by her husband."

"But your wife surely could not believe this tale?"

"No, she does not believe it, but she affects to do so."

"And what are you going to do with the child?"

"I don't as yet know. I cannot keep it here; I suppose I must board it somewhere."

"That plan will not answer," said Arthur; "it would only cause fresh gossip. You must entrust the child to some respectable quiet people, who will take charge of it, and not make it the subject of conversation with their neighbours."

"Such people are rare," said the doctor; "are you acquainted with any?"

"Yes," cried Arthur, "they are rare, I grant, but there are signs by which they can be recognised. The expression of the eye tells that the heart is good and noble; an open, candid smile shows the purity of the soul; one single word uttered by a melodious, sweet voice, makes you feel

that truth and integrity are there. Such a being breathes an atmosphere of goodness and innocence."

"Arthur! Arthur!" said his astonished brother, "you speak with strange fire and enthusiasm. Do you know such a being? If the original is like the portrait you have sketched, I should like to know her."

"You shall know her," answered Arthur. "The original, whom it surpasses my powers to paint, is a girl whom I love! and how I love her, Edward! She shall be mine at whatever cost!"

"Then the report I heard is true?" answered the doctor, sadly. "Alphonse hinted it to me repeatedly, but I would not listen to him."

"I know well that in the eyes of my family and of the world it will be considered incomprehensible folly. I love a girl who is young, lovely, and pure as an angel, and this girl I am resolved to marry, though she belongs to no known family, though her father is a poor copyist, and she herself a dancer!"

"I fear the great stumbling-block will be her profession. You will have some terrible scenes with our mother; she will scarcely survive what she will consider such a calamity. Have you quite made up your mind?"

"If I wish to remain a man of honour I cannot

draw back; nor indeed do I wish it. But I own I dread being the first to break it to my mother."

"Give Alphonse the outlines of the story, and it will soon reach her ears."

"I will do so this very day."

"Now, before we part, tell me if you really know any one with whom I can safely place the child?"

"Certainly," answered Arthur, while a glad smile lighted up his face. "Clara will be charmed to take care of her."

"Clara!"

"Yes, Clara, my bride; and if you choose to take your *protégée* and me there in your carriage now, you can at the same time make the acquaintance of your future sister-in-law."

"I will indeed, with pleasure," said the doctor, rising from his chair; "but I am unwilling to leave my own children to the care of my negligent, lazy servants."

"You are right," said Arthur; "we will first go to Marianne and beg her to come here. Indeed, she had already resolved to take charge of your house till you had got new servants. Perhaps we may meet her on her way here."

Arthur took off the hat and cloak of the little girl, and putting on her old straw bonnet and warm mantle, he carried her into the carriage. They drove to the banker's house, but to the back door, that

Alphonse might not see them arrive, and torment them by his inquisitiveness. They left the child in the carriage, and ascended to the second *étage*. They met two women on the stairs coming down, who seemed very merry, and were laughing and talking, having no idea they were observed. One stopped short on the landing-place, and said, "A charming lady, that. How stupid of us never to try this house before! Only think, Emilie, she has given me a ducat!"

"But the old lady below was stingy enough," said the other; "thirty kreuzers only, though we showed her such brilliant testimonials from two clergymen and from the Institution for the Modest Poor. Here they are; take care of them."

"Give them to me," said the mother; "but where is the paper in which they were wrapped? Oh! I suppose I left it lying on the table up-stairs. It's no matter."

"Do you know what paper it was?" said the more cautious daughter.

"It was the paper in which Becker folded the gloves she gave me, and Marie's address on it."

"Never mind—what can it signify?" And so saying, they went down stairs.

Arthur felt sure he had seen the face of the younger of the two in the Balken-Gasse.

"Come along!" cried the doctor, impatiently, who

had run up-stairs before him. He had already opened the glass door, and Arthur followed him.

They entered their sister's salon, and found her standing at the window. She had on her hat and shawl, evidently prepared to go out; but she did not turn her head when her brothers entered, and not even when Arthur said: "It is Edward and I, Marianne."

The doctor went up to her at the window, took hold of her hand, which was hanging down, and said: "What is the matter, sister?—you are weeping. Do my misfortunes distress you so much?"

"Certainly, Edward," said she; and turning to him, she clasped his hand, saying, "I am indeed most miserable."

This was incomprehensible to Arthur. He had been with Marianne only an hour before, and she had discussed Edward's domestic trials with perfect composure—indeed, she had even said she thought it fortunate that such constant torment for poor Edward should cease. Why then these tears now? "Marianne," said he, after a pause, while she continued to cry bitterly—"be candid with us; something painful has occurred. If we can comfort or assist you, how happy we shall be."

Marianne sank on the sofa, and a piece of white paper fluttered out of her hand on the floor. Arthur saw it, and involuntarily the conversation of the

two women on the stairs recurred to him. He stooped to pick up the paper, but when he saw Marianne do the same, he discreetly drew back.

"Take it," said Marianne; "I wish to have no secrets from you. Look closely at the address, and you too, Edward. Whose writing is it?"

An involuntary smile crossed Arthur's countenance when he looked at the paper and saw the address, but he gave it to his brother in silence, who called out instantly: "Ah! this is Alphonse's writing; it is the clear, bold, legible hand of your husband."

"It is so," said Marianne, in an irritated tone; "read aloud what is written there."

"Fräulein Marie K——. At Madame Becker's, Kanal-Strasse, No. 20."

"Do you know who this Fräulein Marie K—— is?" said Marianne.

"No," said the doctor. But Arthur answered nothing.

"Oh, I am not easily deceived! Here is the new Street Guide. I found the name at once. 'No. 20, Kanal-Strasse, Marie K——, ballet dancer.' A dancer, shameful! shameful!"

The doctor looked significantly at Arthur, and thought a Street Guide is a dangerous invention; then he said: "But what does it mean?"

"What it means!" said she, passionately, for she

had passed from sorrow to anger, "I will tell you! I, his deceived, neglected wife, whom he always lectured, who heard constantly from him what was due to propriety and to morality—I, whom he would not allow to appear in a tableau, nor to dance more than once with an intimate friend of my family—I, who if his preaching and fault-finding were to be credited, was full of levity and thoughtlessness!—" After this burst of indignation she took breath, and then continued, sobbing, "Yes, I will tell you. On Christmas-eve he bought some gloves."

"That is true," said the doctor, "for I was present. We met in a shop, and he said he was buying gloves for——"

"For whom?" interrupted Marianne, impatiently.

"Well! for you," answered the doctor; "at least so he said."

"Ah! for me," cried Marianne, "the traitor! On that evening, as I passed his room, I saw by chance the packet of gloves—gloves for a ballet dancer! That is too disgraceful! I will go straight to mamma and tell her the whole story."

"That would be very unwise," said Arthur; "what good will it do you?"

"I shall unmask a hypocrite!"

"Let us search into the affair first, and ascertain the truth," said Arthur.

“ Ah ! a dancer ! ”

“ Oh ! let the dancers alone,” answered her brother, gravely. “ Who knows whether this girl is even acquainted with Alphonse, or whether all his efforts have not failed.”

“ Fail with a ballet dancer ! ”

“ Compose yourself, sister,” said the doctor; “ we will find out the truth for you, and act accordingly; but as one service deserves another, will you be so kind as to accompany me to my poor forsaken children ? ”

“ With pleasure,” said she. “ I was just going to your house, and there I will now remain,” added she, in a resolute tone.

“ But Alphonse ? ” said Arthur.

“ Ah ! ” said Marianne, “ no doubt he will think my conduct contrary to all rule and propriety; but let him come to me ! I will tell him the meaning of propriety and impropriety.”

The conversation ended, and all three left the room. Marianne had effaced all traces of tears, and went along with a haughty air she had never before assumed. The brothers got into the carriage, and drove with Catherine’s little orphan to the Balken-Gasse.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE STAGE.

WHEN at the theatre a regular ballet is not given, but merely groups and dances to assist in embellishing a great opera, the dressing-rooms are less occupied, and the theatre carriage and Schwindemann have not so much to do as usual. Some of the dancers, who are not perhaps to appear till the third or fourth act, go on foot to the theatre, carrying their own bundles, which, as they are this evening only to dance a minuet, are not large; others, who have a more complicated costume, probably at the *dénouement* of the piece to appear as fairies high in the clouds, come earlier, but as they are few, they don't bring much animation into the spacious dressing-rooms of the *corps de ballet*.

Few lights are burning. The dressers, who have soon finished the little they have to do, look very

much bored. Monsieur Fritz, the *friseur*, leans yawning against one of the mirrors, and relates to the ladies terrific ghost stories or horrible murders, in which he takes particular delight.

This evening there is a fairy opera. In the first act some elves and spirits appear, in the third there are some peasant dancers, and at the end of the fifth a tableau as a grand finale, where the fairy Amorosa, the benefactress of true love, appears in the clouds to bless the pair united after so many difficulties.

In one of the dressing-rooms were Therese, Elise, with three others of the same standing and age, besides half a dozen rats (as they are technically called), who represent angels and cherubims. The little creatures, in very pink tricots, white gauze dresses, golden girdles, and sky-blue wings, were practising in a romping way their groupings, often tumbling over each other, and, in their awkward movements, looking more like little demons than inhabitants of the celestial regions.

Therese was standing before a mirror—a young fairy—and very handsome she looked; and she seemed very much satisfied with herself, if you could judge by the well-pleased glances she cast at herself in the glass. One of her colleagues, a pale, delicate-looking girl, in the dress of a court lady, sat near her, fanning herself, and looking occasionally

at the handsome Therese with an expression not quite free from envy.

"But, Therese," said she, after a pause, "when I see you so charming and so brilliant, I can scarcely believe that you are going to give up this fascinating position to retire into domestic life."

"And yet it is so, my dear," answered Therese. "I am quite resolved to give up my profession, and I have demanded my dismissal. I am sick of this life, and intend to change entirely."

"So the report is really true?" asked M. Fritz, laughing, who had slipped in unperceived. "Ah! the happy man!"

"Pray have you the pleasure of his acquaintance?" asked Therese, scornfully.

"I buy my cigars from him, and also my sugar and coffee."

"I hope, then, you will continue to favour us with your custom," said the dancer, saucily. And, singing snatches of a new opera, on she danced into the adjoining room.

Here were Clara and Marie in their usual corner, and the former was evidently, with her sweet voice, saying some consoling words to her companion. Marie was the picture of grief and despair, and the hardest heart could not have resisted asking the cause of her sorrow. Her dark hair was hanging neglected over her shoulders down to her lap, and

her head was bent, her hands were clasped, and quivered when the scalding tears, which fell incessantly from her eyes, dropped on them.

"It is time, dear Marie," said Clara, quietly, "to arrange your hair. Do cease weeping. My heart aches for you. At least speak to me. Have you no longer any confidence in my friendship?"

"Oh yes! yes!" sobbed Marie, with difficulty; "but you cannot comprehend my misery. Till now I never had a secret from you, but this I cannot tell you."

"Speak to Therese, then," answered Clara, perplexed. "Here she comes. She will arrange your hair, and I will go into the next room."

Marie made no answer, but she raised her head languidly, and, on seeing Therese, she pressed her hands to her face with a fresh burst of tears.

"Marie, dear Marie!" said Therese, "what on earth has happened? But I am not surprised."

Marie looked round timidly, and when she saw that Clara was gone, she sprang up hastily, and grasping her companion's hand convulsively, she said, "Therese, I am lost!"

"Come, it can't be so bad as that," answered the other: "do compose yourself: don't let all the world know what has passed. That nice Fritz and one of the dressers have already looked in: so do sit down and let me dress your hair: for you will be wanted

soon on the stage. And now tell me what has happened without preface. I think I can guess what it is."

"Yes, you know it," said Marie; "the same persecution I told you of before."

"That hypocrite we saw in the fourth box?"

"The same. My aunt spoke of him incessantly to me. I told her of Richard and our love, but she was frantic, and said she had not taken me as a helpless child, and educated me so well, to become the wife of a carpenter; it was abominable ingratitude on my part, and that she was resolved to reap where she had sown, and if she were obliged to force me to a more brilliant lot she would not hesitate to do so. The man came, too, once or twice, stealing to the house in twilight, and my aunt forced me to sit quiet to listen to his fine speeches. Once my aunt left the room for a time, but he saw so plainly my abhorrence that he did not venture to approach me. This happened more than once. He wished to make me a present on Christmas-eve, but I refused to see him; still he persisted in sending me gloves."

"Make haste," said Therese; "there is no time to lose."

"Yesterday afternoon," continued Marie, in a low voice, "my aunt went out, as she often does. I was quite alone in the room—indeed, almost alone

in that large house, for you know that the people who live there go out to work during the day and only return at night. Then he came. Oh, Heavens! Therese." Marie now burst into a fresh flood of tears, and was so violently agitated that Therese was obliged to drop the long plaits of hair which she was trying to wind round her head.

"Well," said the other, "he was importunate; and you, my poor child, did your best to repulse him."

"I did, indeed; I screamed for help, but no one heard me. I was struggling with him when help came, but help that will prove my destruction!"

"Richard came in?"

"No, Schwindelmann. He was sent to announce to-day's opera."

"But you were saved."

"But to what purpose? I am equally lost in Richard's eyes. The villain rushed off instantly, turning aside his head so that Schwindelmann could not recognise him."

"Villain indeed!"

"Schwindelmann remained standing in horror at the door, stammered out his message, and then said, sorrowfully, 'Oh, Mademoiselle Marie, I never could have believed such a thing of you!'"

"Does he know your engagement to Richard?" asked Therese, anxiously.

"Certainly not; but—forgive me, Therese, for saying so—you know Schwindelmann has always said he preferred Clara and me to all the others, because—but don't be angry—because we were both well-conducted and had no lovers. He said we were sure to do well."

"You must explain the affair to him, and that as soon as possible."

"He won't even look at me," answered the weeping girl; "he shrugs his shoulders, and gets out of my way. The others will soon perceive that; they will lay their heads together, and mock me. Richard will hear it, and alas! he has a thousand times said to me, 'Marie, so long as you conduct yourself virtuously, and that no man can say a word against you, so long you are mine and I am yours in body and soul, but be doubly careful.'"

"It is a pity you did not confide the affair to him," said Therese, shaking her head. "I fear it is a bad business."

"Oh, how often I thought of doing so, but I was afraid both of my aunt and of Richard himself, he is of so jealous a disposition. Help me, Therese, and advise me."

"I will do both gladly, but first of all I must speak to Schwindelmann. But I know him well; when anything vexes him he hides during the whole evening. When we are going home in the car-

riage at night, however, he can't get out of my way, and I will then tell him the truth."

In the mean time, Clara had returned into the room to remind the others that it was time to finish dressing. Therese had fastened up Marie's long glossy hair, and placed a scarlet pomegranate flower on each side.

"What a pretty effect these red flowers have in her dark hair," said Clara. "But I have not had an opportunity, Therese, of wishing you joy—I hear you are soon going to be married?"

"Yes, my child, it is so," said she, coolly, "but I don't know whether it is a subject for congratulation; perhaps I shall fall from Scylla into Charybdis."

"But you are making a good match, which I sincerely rejoice at. Herr Berger is well off, and has a good business."

"Ah!" said Therese, "he has made love to me for years, and would take no rebuff, though I often told him candidly that I had no inclination to quit the excitement of my present life, and all its pleasures. I advised him strongly not to marry me. He is much older than I am, and I don't think he is wise in taking a wife so full of whims and caprices."

"Then how has the event been settled at last?"

"I will tell you, my dear. I have endured long enough the humours of others in this house—I have

led the life of a slave for years ; now I mean to have my turn, and see how I like ordering about others. So I have condescended to accept Herr Berger as my bondsman for life."

Marie was now dressed, and when the bell sounded, Therese walked, in her usual stately fashion, first, and the others followed her.

The overture had begun, and Therese crossed the half-dark stage towards the background where her place was in the first scene of the opera. She looked round on every side for Schwindelmann, but he was nowhere to be seen.

After the overture and the first scene were at an end, during which the sky shone in indescribable splendour, the group of dancers looked most captivating, but unfortunately the brilliant sky-blue light being rather too dark, made the cherubims look in a state of collapse, and the thunder lasted rather too long. Then the scene changed. As this was to remain during the whole act, the usual rendezvous under the stage was soon thickly peopled with our old acquaintances, Hammer, Richard, Schellinger, Wander, &c.

"Is the fairy car at the end of the piece in good order, Richard?" asked Hammer.

"I will answer for that," said he. "I tried it thoroughly this afternoon ; it goes as if oiled."

"And who is to hold the large rope which steadies

the whole machine? Everything depends on that, for if it is allowed to give way an inch, the whole affair will tumble down, and then good night to this world for any one standing on it!"

"Don't be afraid," answered the young carpenter. "I am to hold the rope myself, and when once I have grasped it, the whole ballet may stand on it safely."

"The poor dancers must have a good share of courage too," said Herr Wander; "it is no joke to be on a machine suspended by a couple of wires, or one rope, and to see down two stories under the stage."

"Oh! they are accustomed to it," said Schellinger, "and don't think at all about it."

During the second and third act this place was cleared of every one, for there were to be many changes on the stage. Much thunder and lightning, waterfalls which were obliged to be unremittingly turned, and troubled seas with heavy waves, when all who could be mustered together crept under the large sheet of canvas painted to represent water, and were obliged to jump up and down under it like frogs, to keep the waves in constant motion.

Therese, whether by chance or intention on the part of Schwindelmann, had not yet been able to speak to him, for each time she saw him he seemed too busy with the carpenters to look round.

Marie had only seen Richard for an instant the whole evening, when at the end of the first act he had helped her out of her fairy car, and pressed her hand tenderly, saying, "Dear Marie, how lovely you look this evening. When we are married you must dress your hair just so, and I will find the scarlet flowers for you."

The last act came. The first scenes were played in a narrow space, so as to give plenty of room for the grand flying car. The large space under the stage was opened for this purpose, and we beg our kind reader to look down into it. It is dimly lighted, and full of ropes, wires, ladders, steps, apparatus for raising and sinking machines through the trap-door. This is an important place for all melodramas and fairy pieces, for hence issue underground and spirits' voices; the winds howl from its deep recesses. From here tongues of flame issue out of the depths of the earth, when an evil spirit rises to the surface; and angels and demons ascend from this spot.

It is usually very dark, and only lighted by two dim lamps; but in this evening's opera, where all the brightness of the celestial regions, and all the terrors of Lucifer are to be displayed, there was sufficient light to distinguish the objects around, and the largest trap-door being open, a bright light came through the aperture.

Richard was standing with his rope, and Schwindelmann, who had nothing to do at that moment, was seated near him on the steps. The closing scene approached, and six men set in motion the flying car. A bright light was to blaze in the whole sky, and as a finale, the fairy Amorosa, the protectress of true love, was to emerge from the centre of its radiance on a cloud twenty feet higher than the car. There were first two long scenes; and when, as an introduction to them, the orchestra played soft ærial music, Schwindelmann took out his snuff-box and offered Richard a pinch, who accepted it laughing, and said, "I can still make use of one hand; but afterwards, when I must support my fairy securely in the sky, I shall require both hands, and to put forth all my strength. Looking upwards from this gloomy spot," continued he, after a pause, "I must say the fairies are very bewitching. How handsome Therese looks to-night!"

"Oh! I have seen that kind of thing times without number," said Schwindelmann, crossly. "There is no delusion for me. I fetch them from their homes, and shove them into the carriage afterwards, too often, to be taken in by their stage attractions."

"You ought to consider yourself very fortunate, I think."

"Oh! they are all indifferent to me, and always will be so," answered the old man, gravely. "It

vexes me to be obliged to see all their levity and follies, poor things! They come here at first with the best resolutions to remain good and honest; they do resist for a time, but—the temptations are too great. I pity the young creatures from my heart! Here in velvet and silk, in pomp and splendour—at home in poverty and misery. Then come proposals and promises of a brilliant future, and then—body and soul are purchased! It is heart-breaking.”

Richard looked upwards again, and the dazzling light, the silk, the gold, the false jewels, the rosy cheeks, and the sparkling eyes seemed to him less brilliant.

“I do think it is most sad,” said he. “But there are some among them who are well conducted. For instance, your two favourites, Clara and Marie,” continued he, laughing; “I know you would go through fire and water for either of them.”

“Richard!” called out Hammer through the speaking-trumpet, “the highest car in the clouds will move immediately. Lay hold of the rope. When I call out to you, seize it firm and hold it fast. Don’t let it give way a hair’s breadth.”

“No fear!” cried Richard, gaily. “Now come here, Schwindelmann. Just look how pretty your favourite Marie looks!”

“I never want to see her again,” said the other, turning away his head.

"What's that you are saying?" said Richard, starting, and turning his head round. "That you never wished to see Marie again?"

"Yes, I said so," answered he. "But what's that to you? What need you care for the follies of these girls at home?"

In the anxious hope of hearing more, Richard affected indifference, and said, "To be sure it is nothing to me, and I only asked because no one has ever yet said one word against Marie—not a syllable! You must admit that?"

"Till now I have always been the first to say so."

These words "till now" struck like a dagger into the heart of the young carpenter. He trembled violently, and everything seemed to become black before his eyes. Breathing with difficulty, he said,

"'Till now,' Schwindelmann? What do you mean?"

"I don't choose to explain."

"Come, come," said Richard, "don't excite my curiosity for nothing."

"Well, then, till yesterday," said Schwindelmann, out of all patience. And after looking up at the pretty Marie, he continued, "And how innocent the girl looks! Since yesterday, however, I have good proof—that of my own eyes—that she is as bad as any of them."

At this moment the voice of the head machinist was heard calling out "Steady below! and when I call again, hold fast the rope!"

The Bengal lights blazed up in their red splendour, and threw a radiance even under the stage, streaming through all the joints of the planks and trap-doors, and down below the whole theatre seemed to be on fire. Then sounded flutes and harps, and soft music accompanied the gradual ascent of the protectress of true love. There was a general exclamation of delight from the public. "Steady!" was again shouted through the speaking-tube, and Richard seized the rope, and held it with all his strength. But his thoughts were not there—not even with the fairy Amorosa—all his ideas were concentrated in Schwindelmann, who now composedly related how he had yesterday gone to Marie's home to announce the opera, that he knocked, but received no answer. "I then," continued he, "opened the door, and found Marie alone, that is, without her aunt, for a well-dressed gentleman was with her, and—held her in his arms!"

"In his arms!" cried Richard, in a tone of agony. He threw up his hands, and uttered a dreadful cry, which was echoed by a terrific scream of agony from above. The music stopped, a hundred voices were heard exclaiming and shouting. There was a

crash on the stage, as if the floor was giving way; a heavy mass came tumbling down at the feet of Richard—a mass of planks and ropes, and among them the body of a poor young girl, who a second before had shone forth in all her youth and beauty, and now lay motionless, as if dead.

“Marie!” cried Schwindelmann, rushing to her, and lifting her gently in his arms. And kneeling down, he supported her head against his shoulder.

“Heaven willed that—not I,” muttered Richard, in a tone of desperation. He staggered back, and would have fallen if he had not supported himself by clinging to the iron pillars. All those belonging to the theatre came rushing down steps and ladders—in short, all who were on the stage—to ascertain the extent of the misfortune. Therese was among the first. She shuddered at sight of the death-like aspect of the poor girl, lately so blooming; then she seized Richard’s arm, and said, “You did that on purpose—you are her murderer!” She had seen Schwindelmann, and guessed the conversation that had taken place.

“No! no!” said Richard, in a hoarse whisper. “You are unjust. I don’t know how the rope slipped out of my hands.”

“And did Schwindelmann tell you nothing?”

“Yes, unfortunately I did,” said the latter, who overheard her question.

"Oh, dreadful! dreadful!" cried Therese, sobbing loudly, and throwing herself on her knees beside Marie. "Poor, poor creature! But perhaps it is best so!" She gently rubbed her forehead, and dried some drops of blood which oozed slowly from her pale lips.

In a few minutes a circle of horror-struck faces surrounded the unfortunate girl. Many voices called for a surgeon, but it was long before one could be found. The doctor belonging to the theatre chanced not to be in the way, but one of the messengers met Dr. Erichsen, and brought him instantly.

The circle opened as the doctor came down the steps, and there was a death-like silence as he gently raised the head of the insensible girl, felt her limbs, and looked into her glassy eyes. There was not a sound, and every eye was fixed on the surgeon. When he shook his head mournfully, and whispered some words to the manager, who stood close to him, all saw that there was little or no hope. The dancers, who had withdrawn a little way from poor Marie, now hurried to her side, all weeping, kissing her hands and the plaits of her long, glossy hair, which had fallen down, and in which the pomegranate flowers were still blooming and fresh.

"But how did this dreadful accident happen?" cried the manager, who was pressing his hands convulsively together; "whose duty was it to hold the rope?"

At this question all withdrew from Richard's side, leaving him standing alone, his face livid, and his eyes distended.

"It was I who did it!" said he, after a pause. Suddenly his eyes wandered, his hands clutched the air as if trying to seize something, his knees gave way, and if some of the workmen had not caught him he would have fallen to the ground; but his companions let him down gradually, and laid his head on one of the steps.

Dr. Erichsen now directed that they should raise the poor girl, and carry her in a litter to her home. He wrote down her street and number, and then left the theatre with Arthur. That the latter found a moment to speak a consoling word to the distressed and terrified Clara we do not doubt.

They lifted Marie, carried her carefully on the stage, and four of the workmen conveyed the body of the unhappy girl home. Therese, with her usual energy and resolution, had covered her nymph's costume with a warm cloak, and accompanied poor Marie. She repeatedly on the way grasped her hands, hanging lifelessly down from the litter, and kissed them tenderly, while her tears streamed over Marie's cold fingers. But no one saw it, except the thousand stars which shone in the clear heavens.

Richard had slowly recovered consciousness; Schwindelmann had stayed with him, and dashed

cold water in his face. "Is she gone?" asked he, as he opened his eyes. "But she is still alive, is she not?"

Schwindelmann's eyes were filled with tears. "Yes," answered he, "she is still alive. But tell me, Richard, she was your bride?"

"She was," said the young carpenter, with trembling lips, "and if she dies she will remain my bride, for she will always live for me; but if she lives and recovers, then she will be dead for me."

"Amen!" said the other, in an unsteady voice. Both then slowly ascended the stairs leading to the stage, and after all that had happened a dead silence and gloom now reigned in every part of the theatre.

CHAPTER III.

THE FUCHSBAU.

LATTERLY there had been very little going on in the Fuchsbau. Strangers seldom came there, and the usual guests had been so occupied that they had neither time nor inclination to meet. Those who had money, preferred going to other taverns, where they were not so closely watched, for in the Fuchsbau the very walls of the tavern seemed to have ears, and the old portress sharp eyes. There was something oppressive in the atmosphere of this place even for those hardened beings, and when the sound of a certain bell was heard, few brought their glass to their lips. This evening the door-bell had sounded, but the old woman was alone in the room at the time. She had jumped up as quickly as her old limbs would admit of, had ascertained that the wires were all right, and mounted

on a chair to examine a small box close to the wall, which hung about eight feet from the ground, in which was a fine chain, which went through the ceiling and communicated with some other part of the house. This box served an important purpose, for when that bell sounded the old woman's duty was instantly to turn off the gas, so that the house might be in utter darkness. During the long period the old portress had lived here that bell had only sounded once, and then on a fearful night, of which she never thought without horror.

The stairs and passages were nearly as deserted as the room. Though well lighted, only one man was walking quietly and regularly back and forwards like a sentry—and, indeed, such was his office. From the spot where he was stationed he could see all along both passages and also the stairs, and when he stood still and listened he could hear the softest step even in the most distant part of the building. The door near which he was standing is not unknown to us; it leads into an ante-room, and thence into an apartment panelled with dark oak.

As on a former evening, which our reader may remember, the curtains were let down, and some logs of wood were crackling in the fireplace; two candles were standing on the table with its green cover, and in the arm-chair he sat in the same dress he wore when we last saw him here. His

legs were crossed, his right hand supported his chin, while his left hung down negligently holding the Circassian dagger in his girdle. Matthias was standing before him in a respectful attitude.

"So Schwemmer is dead? When did he die?" said he.

"Eight days after your visit, sir; perhaps his terror injured him—he was not able for much exertion. Perhaps, too——"

"Well, what?—why do you hesitate?"

"I mean, perhaps some one helped him quickly out of the world."

"I hope not. Why do you think so?"

"I don't know it for a fact, but I don't think it looks well that from that evening Strauber was never out of the house. He used to affect to think the house far too low for him, but since that time he and the widow have been constantly together."

"I have no doubt that villain Strauber will come to a miserable end," said the unknown. "Is he closely watched?"

"As closely as possible; but he is a deep one, and always in a fright, so he is uncommonly cautious."

"Does he go to any houses where he has no express business?"

"I have seen him several times lately near the palace. The first time I followed him, and then

joining him, I said carelessly, 'Ah, Strauber, where are you going?' I thought he would invent some lie, but he told me quite coolly that he had just left the palace, where he had some little business."

"What could that possibly be?"

"He said he was an agent for an insurance burial company."

"What is that, Matthias?"

"They are institutions where you can insure any one's life, and at their death you receive a certain sum. Such a villain as Strauber can make a good thing of it. He has only to insure any poor creature's life at several such places, and then when he dies, or is assisted to die, Strauber gets a considerable sum. I know that Strauber and Madame Schwemmer had insured old Schwemmer's life repeatedly."

"But what was he doing in the palace?"

"He said he was doing business in the burial insurance line for some of the servants, but I don't believe him. He goes to see the old general, Baron von Weiss. I have seen him twice come out of his apartments."

"Ah! he goes there, does he?" said the other, eagerly; "that interests me to the greatest degree. Spare neither money nor trouble, Matthias; have him watched by some confidential persons; report

every step he takes to me, and that as circumstantially as possible."

"Rely on me, sir. You desired me to take information about Herr Johann Christian Blaffer, a bookseller?"

"I did so; it had escaped my memory."

"Herr Blaffer intends to sell his house, so there will be a pretty good sum for me to carry off."

"Who lives in the house?"

"First, Herr Blaffer himself, then a silly apprentice, and a very pretty girl, who deceives her master famously."

"You must tell me about that," said the other, muttering, "Poor Beil, this shall cure you entirely."

"There is a young fellow who lives next door, who affects to be a fine gentleman, and so has won her good graces."

"A kind of scamp, I suppose?"

"Something of that kind, but he is very much in love with the girl; and I must say, as her excuse, that though her first lapse from virtue was owing to fraud and force, so the second was sure to follow, as she felt her character was entirely ruined."

"The young man comes into the house?"

"Yes, sir; he climbs over the roof of the adjoining house like a cat. I don't think the bookseller will catch him in a hurry."

"Let me know," said the other, "as soon as he has got the money for the sale of his house, and I will give you instructions. But observe them strictly, for if one iota of my plan fails the whole thing is at an end. Now you understand. I have no more to say to you at present."

Matthias answered in a tone of submission: "Whatever you command, I will obey without flinching. But I hope to make a better end."

"I know you do; and you shall soon wind up our affairs and be a free man—free to lead a new life and to repent of the past. Adieu. Joseph is waiting—send him in."

Matthias left the room, and Joseph, Count Fohrbach's chasseur, entered.

"Ah, it is you, Joseph—Franz Karner—you make yourself scarce. There must be very little to report at home, you come here so seldom!"

The chasseur seemed embarrassed, but he answered, "You know, sir, I am devoted to you body and soul, and that I will keep my word."

"Even when it grieves you?" said the other.

"Even when it grieves me," said the chasseur, in a submissive tone.

"What have you to tell me to-day?"

"There was a *soirée* at the minister of war's, and there my master met Mademoiselle von S—in the winter garden. A declaration of love followed, which was accepted."

"Surely, Joseph, you have more to report than such a trifling matter?"

"You are right, sir," answered the *chasseur*. "I have come here, I must confess, after a severe struggle—not from dread of your anger, sir—though I know well that you could crush me in a moment—though I know that it would only cost you one pull of that bell to doom me never again to see the light of day—but I come from gratitude for all you have done for me, and it is this feeling which induces me to bring you this letter. It is treachery towards my master, but I cannot help myself."

"To Mademoiselle von S——," said the other, taking the letter. "When was it written?"

"An hour ago. My master came from a whist party, and Major von S—— was with him. He seemed vexed and irritated; and while putting on his dressing-gown I heard him saying to Major von S——, 'The duke is really detestable. Fancy his offering to make me a bet that at the great masked ball at court, next week, Eugenie von S—— shall wear his colours.'"

"Ah! the duke is not easily repulsed. He is a dangerous man." Then going to the door, he opened it, held out the letter, and said, "The seal to be carefully opened." Invisible hands received it, and in a minute it was given back through the *portière*, open, by an unseen person.

The letter ran thus: "Forgive me, Eugenie, asking you a favour in this note. This evening there is to be a meeting at the duchess's to consult about the costumes for the masked ball. If it is possible for you to arrange that yours should have white ribbons you will particularly gratify me. Tomorrow I will tell you why I make this strange request."

"The duke will have some difficulty in winning his wager," thought the reader. He folded it together, and gave it to the same invisible hands to seal again, which was instantly done. He then returned it to Joseph, saying, "Thank you for your zeal, though there is nothing particular in the note. *A propos*, I suppose you have heard no more of your wife?"

"Yes, sir, she has followed me and found me out."

"Ah! that is unlucky. She may betray you."

"Oh! no, sir," said Joseph, eagerly; "she is too overjoyed to have discovered me."

"And you?"

"Not less so, God knows, sir, to see her again. She has told me the whole unhappy story, and she is entirely innocent; but the other was not. He deserved his fate."

"And where is she? Beware! Remember, Franz Karner is not married."

"But he will be so, as soon as you choose, sir,"

said Joseph, entreatingly. "Grant me this happiness. I love my wife more dearly than ever."

"Well!" said the other, looking with sympathy at him, "you shall have the permission, and let redoubled zeal for me be my reward. You understand!"

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, sir," cried Joseph. "And if the other must be, it must!" And he sighed heavily.

"It seems a heavy burden on your conscience, Joseph. I am in a kind mood to-day. What would you say if, from this moment, I set you entirely free?"

"What, sir! you would do that?"

"Of course. In that case we should never see each other again."

"How? Never again, sir?"

"Or, at all events, only if misfortune again befall you. In that case I would allow you to seek me here."

"You overpower me by your goodness. And can I not repay you in any other way, sir?"

"I think not. But stop! perhaps you might be able some day to do a service to one of my friends without compromising yourself in the least. You will do it for my sake?"

"Oh! how gladly!" said the chasseur, seizing the young man's hand.

"If, therefore, any one demands a particular

service from you, and says to you it is for me, *Joseph*, you will do what he wishes?"

"As surely as I live or breathe," answered he, with sparkling eyes, "even should it cost me my situation or my life." He pressed the hand of his benefactor to his lips, who drew it gently from him, and shook his head with a smile when he saw tears were in the *chasseur's* eyes.

"Leave me, then," said he, in a gentle, almost trembling voice. "Shake the dust off your feet on this threshold, and, if you can, forget that you have ever been within these walls. Trust to me for your papers to facilitate your marriage, and also that your new household may have some means to commence with. Now, farewell!"

He pointed to the door imperiously, and *Joseph* obeyed his command with reluctant steps. But before going, he turned suddenly, threw himself at his feet, saying, "Oh! forgive me, sir, but I could not part from you thus. I have known you so many long years that it is most painful to leave you for ever. May God watch over you and bless you, and grant that we may one day meet again." He then sprang up and disappeared.

"Amen!" said the other, after a pause, while he drew his hand slowly across his eyes. He remained thinking for a few minutes at the table, and then left the room through the private door already known to the reader.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOULDER-KNOTS AND CARICATURES.

ON the same evening when our last chapter closed, a full hour later Baron Brand left his house. He wore a paletot of dark cloth, which he had closely buttoned ; his hair and beard were carefully arranged and perfumed. He descended the steps, humming a gay air while buttoning his gloves, and when he opened the door he looked up at the sky, which was calm and clear, and sparkling with brilliant stars. There was no snow on the ground, which was hard frozen, so Herr von Brand had ordered no carriage.

Scarcely had he set foot on the pavement when an equipage drew up at his door, so quickly that the baron was nearly knocked over. "Ah ! it is you, my dear friend," he heard a voice in the carriage exclaim ; "I was anxious to see you, so told my coachman to drive quickly."

"Cœur de rose!" answered the baron, "I assure your highness that my precious life was in no small danger. Will your highness get out?"

"No, no," answered the duke. "I want to say a few words only to you, so do come for a few minutes into the brougham."

The baron complied with the duke's wish, and placed himself on the soft cushions by the side of his highness, who said, "I was to-night at a whist party at Major von S——'s."

"Ah! you proposed a bet there?"

"How do you know that? Have you seen Fohrbach or the major?"

"Cœur de rose! no, not for several days."

"Strange! Then since you know everything, I need not tell you the subject of the bet?"

"Certainly not, sir, for I know it perfectly. You proposed—forgive me for saying with considerable levity—a bet that you would persuade Mademoiselle Eugenie von S—— to wear your colours at the masked ball."

"How in the world do you know that?" cried the duke, in the utmost surprise.

"And you wish me to assist you in winning your bet."

"Yes, and no," said his highness. "I cannot win the bet, for the count would not accept it; but my greatest desire is to accomplish my purpose."

"That the young lady should wear your colours?"

"Yes! and thus compromise herself; for I make no progress there."

"It will be very difficult to accomplish."

"My dear baron, you say difficult," said the duke, "but not impossible. Oh! my gratitude shall know no bounds. I will be your debtor for ever."

"Remember these words when I, in turn, make my request; I will one day claim your highness's gracious promise."

"You shall not find me slow to perform it. Now I won't detain you any longer," answered the duke. "Can I set you down anywhere?"

"I am going to your rival, the count," said the baron, laughing; "if you will take me there I shall be much obliged to you."

"Gladly. To Count Fohrbach's!" said he to his coachman. When they arrived there the duke shook hands cordially with the baron, who went through the garden into the house, and was admitted by the old valet with a stiff, solemn bow, and conducted by him to the salon, where he found the young count, Major von S—, Arthur Erichsen, and Herr Ednard. They looked up as he entered, and Arthur and the count exchanged significant glances; and the count said, laughing, "Here comes the baron. He shall judge of the

likeness. Do you remember meeting Herr von Dankwart here?"

"Perfectly," answered the baron.

Arthur rose, and took out of a portfolio in the corner a drawing, which he gave to the baron, who cried out, "Inimitable indeed! quite capital! That is the sketch of a chimpanzee, and the very image of Herr von Dankwart."

"Show him the others also," said the count.

The artist brought five other sketches out of the portfolio, in which the chimpanzee was represented in various attitudes, but always with the most striking likeness to that gracious protector of the fine arts, Herr von Dankwart.

"These drawings are most valuable," said the baron. "I would give a good deal to be able to put them into my album, my dear Erichsen, could so poor a man as I am give you their full value."

"If these sketches were not caricatures," said Arthur, putting them back into the portfolio, "I would have great pleasure in presenting them to you, baron, for your album; but, believe me, as they are they would be a dangerous possession."

"What need we care for Herr von Dankwart?" asked the baron.

"Not for him, but for his royal mistress," said the major, "with whom he is a great favourite. We

must not deliberately thrust ourselves into a hornet's nest."

The major then rose to go away. "I am on duty," said he, "as I promised my wife to fetch her from the palace." The others also took leave of the count, but he begged Arthur to remain half an hour to chat with him.

At the door, Baron von Brand turned, and said, "My good friend Erichsen, I entreat you will reflect on what conditions you will let me have your six sketches. I have taken a great fancy to them. Adieu."

After hearing the house door close, the count said to Arthur, "What on earth does he want with these caricatures of Dankwart? Beware how you let him have them. *A propos*, do you remember our conversation at the ball? We must be very careful not to excite the baron's suspicions. You could see no difference in my manner to him, I hope?"

"Not the least, and I trust you were equally satisfied with my reception of him?"

"Perfectly. I did not detain you without a purpose. I lately made a visit to our president of police, and I turned the conversation on the activity of the police here; and then I cursorily mentioned the loss of my valuable seal, which so recently disappeared. The president insisted on my going to his business room with him, and there he begged me to

describe the seal, where it had been placed, and when it was missed, to his young secretary, who seems a sharp, clever fellow. He said it was strange the number of thefts, some of the most serious nature, which had lately been effected with a degree of boldness and ease evidently proving the existence of a well-organised band, directed by a chief who must possess marvellous caution and foresight, as well as energy."

"So at last they believe there is such a confederacy?" said Arthur. "It is lucky that it begins to dawn on these people in high places. We of lower degree have long felt assured of it, and the Fuchsbau is suspected as the centre of all these suspicious doings. Is the door of your bedroom open? I thought I saw the curtain move."

"My *chasseur*, possibly," answered the count, carelessly. "The police suspected the Fuchsbau, but every attempt to discover any criminal there has failed. They say the only radical cure would be to pull it down."

"We painters would regret that, it is so picturesque," said Arthur, smiling.

"Ah!" said the count, "you have a great taste, by-the-bye, for these old houses and narrow streets; but we are on your track!"

"How so?" asked Arthur.

"When you go along by the canal past the

Fuchsbau, you arrive in some small streets, where you, dear Arthur, are frequently seen wandering about."

"Well! I don't deny it."

"So! a little love affair?"

"No; a serious love affair, Count Fohrbach. It is no idle whim which takes me there. Why should I seek to conceal it? I have found one there whom I truly love and honour, and whom I hope ere long to present to you as my bride."

"In one of those narrow streets?" asked the count, in amazement. "What will your father say, and your stern, uncompromising mother?"

"That is, indeed, a steep precipice which I have yet to climb. But I am not jesting, count—my mind is quite made up."

"And you love each other truly and honestly?" said the count, with sympathy. "If the girl is good and respectable, which I doubt as little as that she is beautiful, for I know your good taste, you are right in throwing aside petty prejudices. Besides, you are an exceptional case—comparatively a free man—an artist."

"I knew I should have your approval and sympathy, and when you have seen my bride you will still more warmly sanction my choice."

"Rely on it, you shall ever find a true and devoted friend in me. You have always been ready to serve me, even in trifles."

"*A propos*," said Arthur, "do you remember asking me to take a note to a certain Madame Becker? It was on the very day you lost your seal."

"I remember it perfectly, and I used Baron Brand's seal."

"So I guessed right," cried the painter. "I remarked its Arabic characters, and it occurred to me afterwards that perhaps the baron had come to your assistance."

"And what of the seal?"

"Why, Madame Becker started when she remarked it, and yet it seemed to compel her to comply with your wish, whatever it was."

"When I wrote to her," said the count, "I asked what I believed to be almost impossible, and I was surprised when I received her answer saying she had arranged the affair. She mentioned 'my powerful friend' in her note, and begged that I would tell him what zeal she had shown. It is evident she meant the baron, and as she recognised his seal, she must be in the habit of transacting matters with him. In fact, when I remember my meeting him so lately coming out of the Fuchsbau, and that girl's report in the blue gallery, and put all these things together, I feel almost convinced that this so-called baron is chief of a band of robbers, forgers, and perhaps murderers!"

"Horrible!" said Arthur. "And if it were so, would you take any measures to unmask and punish him?"

"No; I could not bring myself to be the cause of loading with opprobrium and chains a man whom I had hitherto considered a friend. Indeed, I would rather use all my influence to induce him to quit the country. But how to bring on an explanation with him? That he is entangling a spare round his feet I am convinced, and therefore it grieves me when I see him, as we did this evening, rushing into destruction, so unconscious, nay, so bold and so secure."

"If Baron Brand," replied Arthur, "is really what we suppose him to be, he must be a most extraordinary man, to whom I cannot refuse my admiration for his skill and courage. But he cannot be so unwise as blindly to tread in so dangerous a path. Believe me, his eyes are quite as wide open as ours."

"Well, dear Arthur, as we are talking of mysteries, perhaps you will not consider it indiscreet if I ask you how your rendezvous went off on New Year's evening, when you took my place?"

"Not at all indiscreet, count, for nothing passed between the girl and me that the whole world might not have seen. I got your note, and went at eight o'clock to the corner of the Prinzen-Strasse. I

made a carriage follow me and remain in the shadow of the houses. I had not waited long when I saw a female figure approach with hesitating steps. She was wrapped in a large dark shawl, so that her figure was entirely concealed, and she wore a black silk hood with long hanging lace, which so entirely covered her face that not a feature could be distinguished."

"I dare say; besides, it was a dark night."

"I had placed myself so that she could see I was waiting at the corner of the street for some one."

"Which way did she come?"

"She appeared to come from the theatre. When she was near enough to see my face—which, unlike her, I did not attempt to conceal—she stopped short, and seemed to wish to go back. I said to her, 'You expected another person, Count Fohrbach, but he is prevented coming, and has sent me to offer his regrets and apologies. Perhaps some other day,' continued I, 'he may have the pleasure of meeting you.'"

"And did she make no answer?"

"Not a syllable; indeed, she almost turned her back on me, and only bowed when I asked her if she would use the carriage to take her home."

"She took it, then? Did she name no address?"

"Why, that was unnecessary, for I knew where

Madame Becker lived, and when I asked if the man should drive to the Kanal-Strasse, she merely bowed again, and drove off."

"Arthur," said the count, laughing, "it is lucky for you that she was so thickly veiled, for even your sincere love for another would have had some difficulty in shielding you wholly from so many charms had you seen them in the light."

"Pray who was this dangerous syren?"

"A girl whom hundreds have followed in vain, and who has been hitherto most respectable."

"And yet she was to meet you?"

"The power of gold alone tempted her, and she can be less blamed as she has a family to support."

"A bad, unprincipled business," said Arthur, shaking his head.

"Her profession is respectable—at least, it may be so—for she is like yourself, Arthur, an artist."

"Ah! had I known that I would have entered into conversation with her. But I suppose her art is that of the needle?"

"Wrong, Arthur; higher—or perhaps you will say lower—for the art of this young lady consists in the use of her feet. She is a dancer."

Arthur scarcely knew why this word moved him so painfully—whether it was the tone of levity with which his friend used the term, or because *she* was also a dancer, and it was one of her companions

who appeared on this occasion in so doubtful a light. His heart felt oppressed, and he would have given much that the count had not spoken.

The latter, however, had no idea that he had hurt Arthur's feelings. "Yes," continued he, "as I told you before, the result of my efforts surprised me not a little. I could not believe it, and was quite astonished when I got the note I enclosed to you from Madame Becker. A few days afterwards she sent me her demand, which was heavy enough, but I remitted to her even a larger sum than she asked—it will benefit the poor girl—and I still feel interested (though in all honour) in the fate of the lovely Clara."

"The lovely Clara?" muttered Arthur, starting violently.

The count had thrown away his cigar, and had seated himself near the fire, turning the logs of wood, so he did not see that Arthur became suddenly as pale as death, then pressed his hand to his beating heart.

"Don't you find the room cold?" said the count.

"Not at all, not at all—very warm indeed."

The count took a small pair of bellows which hung beside the chimney-piece, and occupied himself in fanning the flame of the logs.

Arthur sat with the feelings of a man who sees the sword of justice suspended over his head. One

question, and perhaps the death-stroke would descend, and for ever sever him from all happiness in this life. He resolved to know the worst, and in a low, hoarse voice he said, "You spoke of—the—lovely—Clara. So your secret—is betrayed."

"Oh, I don't wish it to be a secret for you," answered the count, "we know each other so intimately; and I am convinced that you will never mention the name of the poor girl to any one."

"No, I certainly never will."

"Besides, I think you have already guessed it. And is not the lovely Clara truly charming and fascinating?—Clara Staiger—one of our most graceful dancers."

There was no longer a doubt, and the unhappy Arthur sank back in his chair, only preserving sufficient presence of mind to cover his face, that his companion might not see his tears; but he felt as if the walls were closing round him to crush him. He must escape into the cold night air to be able to breathe, but he could not thus rush out. His greatest torture was to be obliged to rise slowly and affect composure and weariness, and exchange a few parting words, on indifferent subjects, with the count. Luckily, it was so late that the latter did not attempt to detain him. Arthur thought it an eternity of time before he could reach the door and get his hat, and then the count called him

back to give him his portfolio, which he had forgotten.

At last—at last he was in the open air, and when the cold night wind blew against his burning forehead, he only recovered sufficiently from this stunning blow to endeavour to think.

CHAPTER V.

HERR VON BRAND'S SEAL.

ARTHUR wandered about a great part of the night in a state of agitation and misery which we shall not attempt to describe. Day was dawning when he at last returned home. But he did not sleep. He had made up his mind as to the course he was to pursue ; so, at an early hour, he dressed and went to the house of Baron Brand, taking with him the six sketches the latter wished to possess. The baron, his servant said, was only just up, but he brought back a message requesting Arthur to go to his room. He was reclining in an arm-chair, and wore a silk dressing-gown. Near him was a small table, on which was his breakfast. He insisted on Arthur's taking a cup of coffee, and offered him a cigar, which, however, he declined.

"You will be surprised, baron," said the painter,



"that I intrude on you at so early an hour, but I come to give you a proof of my desire to fulfil any wish of yours. Yesterday you seemed very anxious to possess six sketches of a friend of ours. Here they are."

"Really!" said the baron, surprised, "I never dreamt of your letting me have them. I shall be delighted to possess them. But the drawings are valuable, and I only consider them mine on your naming your conditions, which, indeed, I accept beforehand."

"Don't promise too much," said Arthur, gravely. "The drawings are valuable, but only on account of the consequences such a work may entail on me. But my demands you may perhaps consider high—perhaps also very low."

"I don't in the least comprehend you, my good Erichsen. Explain yourself more clearly. Name these demands."

"I must first give you a preface," said Arthur. "I have business to transact with a certain Frau Becker, whom perhaps you don't know."

"No! not at all!" said the baron, with the most immovable face.

"Who, however, knows you," continued Arthur.

"Cœur de rose!" said the baron, laughing, "I don't feel at all sure whether that is complimentary to me. But it's no matter. Continue."

"I wish this woman to give me information on a certain point—but true and positive information—and to obtain it I require your intercession."

"Mine? my good Arthur. I tell you I never saw the woman in my life."

"But, nevertheless, she is perfectly acquainted with you."

"Pooh—nonsense! you speak in riddles. But I will listen to you patiently. In what is my interference to consist?"

"You must write for me on a sheet of paper: 'The bearer is my friend, and I desire that you should act towards him as such.'"

"This is a mysterious affair—a most strange whim!" said Brand, laughing. And his laugh was so unconstrained and natural, that no one could have believed that he saw anything in Arthur's request but a singular caprice.

"Which, however, you will fulfil?" said Arthur, anxiously.

"Cœur de rose! of course I will. Must I sign the paper?"

"Not at all; but add your seal."

"My seal? More mysterious still!"

"And that very seal which is fastened on your watch-chain."

"My talisman, my good Erichsen?" cried the baron. "That won't do at all. Pray choose some other seal."

"No, it must be the talisman," said Arthur. "It shall act as one for me to open lips which would otherwise be closed. Do you find my demand in exchange for the sketches too high?"

"Oh! no; they are invaluable to me. But I cannot understand how my poor talisman can work on Madame—— What name did you say?"

"Madame Becker."

"Exactly—on Madame Becker. Tell me the connexion?"

"I don't know it myself," answered Arthur; but looking sharply at the baron, he continued, "Perhaps that woman thinks that the seal belongs to some one whom she has cause to fear. Probably she has no acquaintance with Herr von Brand."

"And why do you suspect this?"

"You may remember lending your talisman some time ago to Count Fohrbach. It was to seal a note to this very Frau Becker, which I, to oblige the count, delivered myself. What the count desired I know not, but this much I do know," continued he, in a trembling voice, "that it was only the sight of the seal which induced her to comply with his wish! Ah! she fulfilled it to the letter!"

There was not the slightest emotion visible on the face of the baron. His smile denoted only attention and curiosity; and when he said, "That is really strange," the words seemed to be spoken in simple surprise.

"Grant my request," continued Arthur, importunately. "A paper without your name, what harm can that do you? I promise you faithfully, too, that you shall have it back to-day."

The baron sipped his coffee coolly, and then, knocking away the ashes of his cigar, he said, "You are one of the persons, my dear Erichsen, towards whom I feel sympathy, and therefore I will fulfil your singular wish; and you may keep the paper, or return it to me, as you choose." He rose, went to his writing-desk, wrote a few words, sealed it with the talisman, and gave it to Arthur, saying, "My dear friend, you see me in complete *négligé*; but you will be able to assure the ladies," continued he, in an affected tone, "that my hair curls naturally, for they all declare it does not."

"You remain a great man in every disguise. Receive my hearty thanks," said Arthur. "Here are the sketches. Be cautious what use you make of them."

He shook hands with the baron, who offered him three fingers with his usual gentle smile, and hastily left the room.

Scarcely had the door closed, when Herr von Brand seemed quite another being. His eyes flashed, all his muscles seemed braced, he stamped passionately, and cried, "What does he mean? My talisman! I was very unwilling to allow the count

to seal with it. And what was his motive in talking of disguise? By Jove! this must be looked to."

Arthur had in the mean time directed his steps towards the Kanal-Strasse. He soon arrived at the old barrack, and his organ of locality made him quickly discover the right stair. The house was as dark and gloomy as ever, but the atmosphere, usually so damp and mouldy, had altered. There was a strong smell of half-withered flowers, incense, and wax candles. It was a dismal, melancholy atmosphere still. All was as still as death in the house, and when Arthur knocked gently at the door, the sound was echoed back in the long passage. "Come in," said a voice from within. And here there was the same oppressive odour, only that of flowers predominated.

Madame Becker was seated at a table, but her appearance and her manner were very much changed. She was dressed in deep mourning, her eyes looked dim, and all her features lifeless and dull. When she saw Arthur, she rose and curtsied.

Arthur's throat seemed closed, he could scarcely articulate, and took the chair Madame Becker offered him, in silence. "You remember me?" said he, after a pause.

"Scarcely," said the woman. "And yet it was something connected with a letter and a request."

"It was so—a letter from Count Fohrbach."

"Oh! now I remember the affair. The count was satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

The woman laid her finger on her lips, turning her head to the next room. Then she said, in a whisper, "Was he not surprised?"

"Yes, very much surprised," said Arthur, with difficulty.

"I can easily understand that," answered Frau Becker, "and I assure you, sir, that no one but myself could have accomplished it."

Arthur winced at these words, but he forced a smile, and said, "I come about the same affair."

"Do you wish also to become acquainted with her?"

"No, no!" cried he, hastily. "I have only to entreat that you will answer some questions I intend putting to you—but tell me the truth. You shall have a good reward; but the truth I must and will have, Frau Becker!"

The woman looked at him distrustfully, and then said, "Above all, I entreat you, sir, to speak low. What is it you wish?"

"You have known Clara Staiger long?"

"Yes, I know her pretty well."

"And you always believed her to be a good and virtuous girl. It must be so," continued he, as the

woman gave him no answer, "otherwise it would not have cost you so much trouble to succeed in—selling her."

She looked very angry, and making a stiff bow, she said, "I beg you will excuse me, sir, but I am quite unable for business matters to-day. I am in mourning, as you must perceive, so I must defer to another day conversing with you."

"Oh! I perceive you don't choose to trust me," said he. "Perhaps you are right—my question was indiscreet without having first shown my authority; but I will do so immediately." He drew forth the baron's paper and gave it to the woman, who looked at the seal, read the note hurriedly, and then sank back in her chair. Her hand trembled as she held the paper.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Arthur.

"By all the saints, yes!" cried the woman. "But, sir, pray tell a poor widow the truth. Are fresh misfortunes to befall me? Will *he* do me an injury?"

"No harm shall happen to you," said he, "if you will tell me the truth—the whole truth."

"I will indeed."

"Had you ever previously heard anything prejudicial to Clara Staiger's character? Don't be afraid to speak the truth."

"No, never!" answered Madame Becker; "on

the contrary, she had always been described to me as virtue itself, and so I believed. You know, when you brought me the letter, I said the thing was utterly impossible."

"And yet it succeeded," sighed Arthur.

Frau Becker had frequently looked anxiously towards the next room, and spoke all the time in a whisper; and when Arthur raised his voice she held up her hand, and said "Hush!"

"It was thus," said she. "Heaven forbid I should say anything against Clara, sir; she was as good a girl as ever lived." During these speeches she had made up her mind to sacrifice her friend Wundel, who, she thought, could easily get out of the scrape by her usual system of lies and cunning. "I knew," continued she, "how difficult the thing would be; besides, I have a conscience, and I had always thought the Staigers respectable people. Poor Clara! how she strove night and day to provide for her family!"

"Proceed," said Arthur, sternly.

"She sometimes comes here."

"To visit you?"

"No! to see the unfortunate Marie. Ah! sir, you know the dreadful accident that happened? She lies a corpse in the next room." Here she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed out, "My Marie! my pride! my treasure! But I will not

distress you, sir, by the sight of my grief—I will control it.” Which, indeed, did not appear difficult, for a few seconds afterwards Frau Becker’s eyes were dry, and her face quite composed. “So, as I said, conscience forbade my undertaking the affair with the girl myself.”

“And who helped you?”

“A friend of mine. But I beg, sir, she may not be injured in any way.”

“No! no! Who is it?”

“It is Frau Wundel. She lives in the Balken-Gasse, No. 40.”

“Ah! in the same house.”

“Yes, sir, where Clara lives.”

“And she conducted the affair?”

“She had the best opportunity, as she lives on the same floor with the Staigers. Hush! hush!” said Madame Becker.

The door of the next room was gently opened, and Clara entered.

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE AND CLARA.

It is difficult to say whether Arthur's distress or Clara's surprise was greatest when they mutually saw each other. Strange thoughts arose in both their minds—in his, bitter and sad; and her surprise, too, was by no means of an agreeable nature. "What is he doing here?" thought she, in the house which she had entered unwillingly, and with a feeling of timidity, solely with the wish to perform the last offices of affection to her deceased friend. He bit his lips, and said to himself, "Ah! it is all as I heard. She goes in and out of this horrid house!"

Though Madame Becker had discovered from the previous conversation that Arthur was interested in Clara, still she had no idea that they were so closely connected, and thought in any event it was neces-

sary to present them to each other. This introduction, and the sudden sight of Arthur in this house, had made a most painful impression on the girl; an inexplicable sorrow filled her heart, and she looked pale and disturbed.

These were all proofs to him of her guilt; but he constrained himself, and said, smiling, with a slight bow, "That he was charmed to make the acquaintance of the lovely Mademoiselle Staiger—so unexpectedly too."

This tone, and the cold look by which it was accompanied, were quite incomprehensible to Clara. She had no idea that Arthur could distrust a heart like hers; and as she knew herself to be entirely innocent, she attributed his change of manner to his embarrassment that she should see him at Madame Becker's when he had never named her as an acquaintance. Nothing further suggested itself to her pure, unsophisticated heart.

It was a painful moment for all three. Even Madame Becker had lost her usual assurance.

Arthur, who had resisted his first impulse to rush out of the room, and wished to appear cool and indifferent, inquired about the horrible occurrence in the theatre, which, indeed, he had himself witnessed; but he could not wholly repress his agitation, and Clara observed it.

"Did you know poor Marie?" asked Madame Becker.

"I remember her, and often saw her on the stage. She was a pretty, blooming creature."

"She was indeed," said Becker. "And now, when she lies there dead! quite dead! you could scarcely believe it; she looks as if she were sleeping. If you do not shrink from it, perhaps, sir, you would go and look at the poor dead child?"

"Why shrink from a sight which must be the fate of us all?" said Arthur, in a low voice. "If it is not too painful to you, I would beg you to take me to see her."

"Oh! the sight of her poor pale face is more than I can bear," said Madame Becker.

"If the gentleman will permit me," said Clara, timidly, "I will take him to where Marie is lying."

"Will you?" said Arthur, in an excited tone. "I certainly, then, accept your offer."

Clara bowed in silence, and, without speaking a word, she went to the next room, followed by Arthur.

On a low couch lay the corpse of the young girl, clothed in white, her waxen hands folded across her breast. She had a wreath of white blossoms in her hair, and round her were scattered a quantity of flowers. Marie was not yet placed in her last dreary home; and as she lay there so placid on the

white sheet, she looked, as her aunt had truly said, like one asleep. Though her face had assumed the peculiar ashy hue of death, a trace of her bright colour still lingered on her cheeks, like the faint pink hue in the centre of a faded white rose. Her lips still looked fresh and red, her eyelids did not look sunk, and her long black eyelashes reposed on her cheek.

Though Arthur felt no horror in looking at the remains of poor Marie, still he felt his heart sad and oppressed; his angry feelings gave way to grief when he thought of Clara, and he regretted less his own loss than the destruction of his once-loved Clara's soul.

She looked up at him, and said, after a long silence, "Alas! poor Marie had become very unhappy! Richard loved her so dearly, and yet she could never have been his!"

"Why so?"

"I don't exactly know all the particulars, but Schwindelmann told him she had become faithless to him, which was most unjust, for Marie never loved any one but Richard. Appearances, however, were against her, and that is very bad, Herr Erichsen."

"It is long since she called me Herr Erichsen," thought Arthur. "Very bad," said he, aloud.

"But it is a greater misfortune for him than even

for her," said Clara, looking at the corpse. "She is dead, and can no longer be tortured or calumniated. But her image pursues him like a spectre. They say that he is in a dreadful state, for it was hinted at the theatre that he had allowed the rope to slip on purpose, and that has come to his ears."

"And what do you think? Did he do so on purpose?"

"Certainly not. He was violently startled when Schwindelmann told him of Marie's faithlessness. I really believe that at the moment he did not know what he was doing, for the shock must have been terrible!"

"Is that your real opinion, Mademoiselle Clara?"

"Why does he call me Mademoiselle Clara?" thought the young girl.

"Do you know," continued he, with a trembling but significant voice, "that kind of thing occurs not unfrequently in this life. For Heaven's sake, Clara," continued he, passionately, "don't look at me so imploringly. I have strange things to say to you."

"I knew it by your changed manner," answered Clara, in terror.

"I can imagine that you know my meaning, but it is better that I should tell it to you here. The sight of this unfortunate creature between us softens my heart, otherwise," said he, in a more excited

tone, "I would speak less calmly. Were I in your father's house, Clara, I would make him responsible for your having deceived me."

"Heavens! Arthur."

"Here, in the house of death, I must command myself, and speak low, but it is a whisper you will understand. Ah! Clara," said he, looking at her sorrowfully, "you have deceived me—basely deceived me. Why you have done so I know not, and I hope I never shall know."

Clara, who had sunk on her knees beside the dead Marie, looked up for a moment in horror, and then hid her face in her hands.

"It is almost the same story as this poor girl's—only you say she was innocent. You dare not say this of yourself. I tear asunder our bonds for ever, here, in the solemn presence of the dead. Heartless, faithless creature!"

Clara, overpowered by the sudden shock of these bitter accusations, had been unable to utter a word in her defence. She could only raise her hands imploringly, and when at last she recovered sufficiently to exclaim, "Arthur! what words are these?" he was gone.

She looked round the room despairingly, passed her hand across her eyes, and would fain have believed she had dreamt a dreadful dream beside the dead Marie, and had not really seen Arthur. Oh! that it had been so! Alas, poor Clara!

CHAPTER VII.

ALL LOST.

IN the house of Herr Staiger, since Blaffer had raised his salary, everything had changed for the better. A thick curtain hung from the window, and under the writing-table was a comfortable roe-skin, which kept the old man's feet warm. The stove, too, was now well supplied with wood, and warmed the room thoroughly. In Clara's absence it was the duty of the old man to attend to the soup for dinner, and he had appointed his little boy Karl as his aide-de-camp, and placed him before the stove, enjoining him to give the alarm the moment he saw the soup beginning to bubble up. At first Karl made a good many objections, as he was particularly busy this morning. The Staiger family had, as we know, received an addition to their numbers, and the little girl whom Arthur brought had been most

cordially welcomed. Arthur had of course stipulated that he was to bear the expense of her maintenance, and the dress of the little thing was now very different. She was no longer so frightened and shy, for the kindness of these good people at once won the orphan's heart. Karl had taken her under his especial care, taught her all the intellectual games he usually played at, at one time making her his horse, at another his army. To-day she was his princess. He had turned Clara's footstool upside down, put the little girl into it, harnessed the fragments of his horse, and in imagination drove his little royal charge half over the world. But his father's commands must be obeyed, so the boy turned the stool again, placed the child on it, gave her a picture-book to look at, and then, unharnessing his horse, he went to the stove.

The little boy executed the commission his father had given him with so much over-anxiety that he interrupted the old man much oftener than necessary. Every moment he thought that the *dénouement* had arrived, and that the soup showed symptoms of boiling over, when he stepped back with a loud cry; so it had happened twice this morning that he had stumbled over his little headless horse, which he persisted in drawing about after him with a string. This of course caused a grand crash and confusion, and it cost Herr Staiger many precious

minutes to disentangle boy, string, and horse, to look at the soup, and to replace Karl at his post. The door opened just after one of these explosions, and Clara entered. The old man said, "Your coming is a real blessing, my love; now you will arrange everything."

He continued his writing busily, so he did not remark the pale, terror-struck face of his daughter.

Clara walked with uncertain steps as if asleep; her eyes were fixed on the ground, and she did not raise them till she had advanced to the middle of the room. Then she looked round at all the well-known objects, a sorrowful smile crossed her face, and she could no longer restrain the tears from trickling down her cheeks. She bent down towards the child, lifted him up, and kissed him repeatedly.

"You are sorrowful, my darling," said her father, looking through his spectacles at her. "You look so pale, and you have been crying. Well, I don't wonder at it. You have been seeing your poor dead friend, and the sight has grieved your kind heart. What is the aunt about? Heaven forgive me, but I believe her to be a wicked woman. Poor Marie, as matters were, is almost better out of the world. But compose yourself, my child. Come and sit down beside me. I never saw you so agitated. Is it the first time you ever saw a dead person? But why do I ask this, when our little darling Anna

was so recently a corpse in this very room?—So quickly are we forgotten.”

“Yes, quickly forgotten indeed,” answered Clara, in a low voice. She placed herself behind her father and laid her head on his shoulder, for her heart was touched by the love of her own family—a bitter contrast to Arthur’s cruel words—and her tears continued to flow incessantly.

“What was I saying?” continued Staiger; “oh, that it was fortunate for poor Marie to be taken to heaven while so innocent. God forgive her aunt, but her bad name was a sad disadvantage to Marie. Ah! men are so evil-minded and wicked! Believe me, Clara, a word, a gesture, a thoughtless glance, however innocently intended, are eagerly seized on by others and related with exaggerations; and the most pure spirit, if once tainted by the poison of calumny, receives wounds which a whole life can scarcely heal.”

“Oh, true, too true!” said Clara.

“This is why I hate all scandal-mongers worse than sin. And the very calumny itself often causes the objects of it to sin; for the proud consciousness of untarnished fame is gone, faith and trust in their fellow-creatures, and those supports which assisted in keeping them upright. Many unhappy creatures have sunk deeper and deeper into vice from the injustice they have suffered from ruthless calum-

niators. A curse on all such, who trifle with the good name of a fellow-creature, and thus often destroy the happiness of a life here and hereafter."

"Alas! alas!" sobbed Clara.

"But why are you crying so bitterly, my love?" said the old man, turning towards her. "Have my words distressed you? But how is that possible? Your happiness in life is only now beginning. You are pure as an angel, my child; your good name is unscathed. No one can ever assail it!"

"Father! father!" said Clara, in a trembling voice, "and yet they have done so!"

"What! my child, my own darling! spoken evil of you? It is impossible!"

"But it is so, father. I have just come from Marie. I arranged her hair for the last time, and fastened in it the wreath which will never be removed. Heavens!" cried she, breaking into a flood of tears, "why am I not in her place—why has not she performed for me this last sad office?"

"Hush! hush!" said Staiger; "the children are listening, and don't know what this all means. Tell your old father what has occurred. I may perhaps be able to advise you and assist you."

"Assist me! You cannot," said she, sorrowfully, "for it is all over. Ah! father, my dream was too delightful ever to be realised."

Herr Staiger said, "You have seen Arthur?"

"Yes, he was there, and Frau Becker said he was an acquaintance of hers."

"I don't like that. And then?"

"He said all was to be at an end between us. He crushed me to the earth by his reproaches."

"But what did he say, Clara?"

"He did not say much; but all I could comprehend was, that it was all over between us, and I saw him stretching out his hands, as if he wished to repulse me." At the remembrance of this dreadful scene poor Clara shuddered, and sank back in her chair.

At this moment the door opened, and Mademoiselle Therese entered the room. She was, as usual, very elegantly dressed; but in the way she had drawn her shawl round her, and in her whole air and haughty toss of the head, there was something determined. She remained at the door in surprise when she saw Clara weeping and her father looking at her with sympathy.

As soon as Clara remarked Therese she dried her eyes, and tried to smile while welcoming her.

Therese made a friendly bow to Herr Staiger, nodded to the children, and then, without more ceremony, drew Clara with her into the recess of a window, saying, in a suppressed voice, "You know, my dear, that I never trouble myself about other people's affairs unless particularly requested to do so;

but I mean to depart from my rule on this occasion, and to ask you a question. You were at Becker's?"

"Yes," said Clara.

"You saw Herr Arthur Erichsen there? Becker told me he had behaved very rudely to you, for he rushed off like a madman, leaving you in tears. Yes, in tears," continued she, angrily, as Clara attempted to deny it. "You are crying now, so you must own he has said very unkind things to you. Are these people always to remain unpunished?" exclaimed she, clasping her hands. "Poor girl! what harm can any one say of you?—you, the best of us all! Perhaps," said she, with a faint smile, "that is not saying much for you; but you are so good, and so excellent and irreproachable, that many young ladies of rank might take example from you. Tell me, child, what has happened? Only give me permission, and I will let him hear my opinion. I will talk to him."

"Oh no! no! For Heaven's sake do not," entreated Clara. "What he said must remain buried in my heart. Perhaps some day I may tell you."

"By that time all may be lost," answered Therese, dissentingly. "Clara, you are too good and too unselfish. I should rather have enjoyed giving the gentleman my opinion; for," continued she, in a tone of decision, "with one member of that family I am resolved to have a serious conversation."

"I entreat you, dear Therese," answered Clara, "let it alone. I am grateful for your sympathy, but what has passed between him and me is sacred."

The other shrugged her shoulders, tossed her head, and said, "You have seen my wish to serve you, and I am not offended by your rejecting my interference ; and I shall always be ready to step forward in your defence, for," continued she, in a gentle voice, "I love you very much, my good, excellent Clara. When I look at you, I always think, 'I might have been like her.' Well ! it might have been otherwise ; but I still consider myself far too good for this miserable world."

She then affectionately kissed Clara's cold forehead, and disappeared as quickly as she had entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADEMOISELLE THERESE.

As soon as the Black Forest clock in the Banker Erichsen's house struck two the old servant always appeared with coffee. It was now half-past two, and yet none of the assembled family, not even the worthy banker himself, who looked longingly at it, had tasted the coffee.

Madame Erichsen sat in the corner of her sofa as usual, but more stiff and rigid than ever. With her pale, hard features, her long, sharp nose, and stiff silk dress of a grey shade, she had no small resemblance to a stone statue. Her very eyes were immovably fixed on one corner of the room. Marianne sat near her. Her arms on the sofa, and her head resting on them, she seemed absorbed in thought, and to pay no attention to those present.

The banker was stretched in an arm-chair at the

window, but his appearance did not betoken ease or comfort. His face was redder than usual. He looked disturbed, and he was frowning in a manner very unusual with him. The doctor stood behind him, his arms crossed, and looking as gloomily at his brother-in-law Alphonse as his kind nature would admit of. The latter was pacing up and down the room, and evidently in much better spirits than the others. He was the first to speak. "A divorce has always something very disagreeable for a whole family when it occurs," said he, "and on that account I would do all in my power to prevent it. I know," continued he, turning to Edward, "that all efforts have hitherto failed with your wife, but we must tell her plainly that, in the event of a divorce, a certain stain always rests on both parties."

"And you really cannot arrange matters, Edward?" asked the banker, in a tone of vexation. "I assure you the gossip about this unfortunate event is not to be endured. Even at the Exchange I hear it discussed."

"Even at the Exchange!" echoed his wife; "that may injure the credit of the house."

"Now!" said Alphonse, maliciously, "let us talk of the other affair. It is about Arthur's very curious history. He no longer makes a secret of it. Indeed, so far as I can gather from you, he rather

wishes that his family should be made acquainted with it."

"Deuce take him!" said the banker; for which unseemly expression he was reproached by a severe look from his wife. "It is not to be told," continued the tormented banker, "what I have to bear. I am sick of it, and will soon show my son who is master here. A fine story, truly—a ballet dancer! What is the creature's name?"

His lady turned to him majestically, and said, "I think your silly speech has been long enough. You are really quite capable of naming this young woman before me! For shame!"

"It's no wonder my patience is at an end," continued the old gentleman, who was now roused to give his opinion even in spite of his wife's frowns. "The young gentleman does not even dine with us now. No rest even at meals," said he, glancing angrily at the cold coffee, "nothing but plague and worry. It is disgraceful in a young man of talent to conduct himself thus."

"That is the very point," said madame. "If you had not permitted him to become an artist, he would never have come in contact with such people."

"But what does he wish?" asked Marianne, who felt an affectionate interest in her brother.

"Wish! Why he wishes to mar——," said the

banker; but a stern, terrific glance from his wife choked the word half way.

"Such things shall not be named in my presence," said she, sitting bolt upright; "I will not listen to them. If we must discuss this——affair, let proper expressions be used."

"But, ma'am, you are really very comical," said Alphonse. "It is his fixed intention to marry, I heard."

"I am never comical, son-in-law," answered madame, with dignity, "and least of all in such a case as the present; and as for any connexion between my son and—the person you allude to, the thing is impossible."

"You know Arthur very little," answered Alphonse. "He will do what he says, rely on it."

"What Mr. Arthur may think fit to do is no affair of mine; but in that case he is no longer a son of mine."

The banker shook his head, and even ventured to send a disapproving glance at his better half, but she did not remark it, and added, "I see that the divorce we have been speaking of cannot be prevented. Nor do I blame Edward. But I will show the world that I have strength of mind to cast out of my family an unworthy member of it. I will rather die alone and forsaken than live surrounded by children whose good name is tarnished."

She looked at her children, and when she saw Edward's sad face, and also that her daughter's eyes were filled with tears, a slight emotion convulsed her hard features, like a sudden flash of lightning passing at night over an ancient ruin.

At this moment steps were heard in the passage, the door opened, and Arthur appeared. If he had been in his usual frame of mind he would quickly have perceived that they had all been speaking of him, and would, in his usual straightforward manner, have inquired what had been said; but he seemed not to observe the sudden silence his entrance had occasioned, nor the anxious looks the family exchanged on seeing him. Contrary to his usual custom he was bent, his eyes fixed on the ground, his face pale, and his manner most extraordinary. He scarcely greeted any one, but went straight up to his mother, who, with a stern look, drew aside; but he seemed not to perceive it, and seizing her hand, he pressed it to his lips.

His mother seemed to consider this as an entreaty, and she shuddered. She was on the point of withdrawing her hand, but she looked up at him, and her face lost its stern expression, and she said to him in a kind, motherly tone, "What is the matter, my child?"

We will not conceal from our readers that when Arthur kissed his mother's hand, she was startled

by feeling tears which dropped from the eyes of her son—so unusual for him that the mother's heart was at once melted.

“Ah, I am thankful that the weather seems clearing up,” said the old gentleman, who had anticipated a storm with considerable alarm; “perhaps we may all yet be reconciled. And now for my coffee at last, though I fear it is almost cold.”

“Now, what is the matter, Arthur?” repeated his mother.

“Not much,” said he, without looking up, but in so loud a voice that all those in the room could hear him distinctly. “I only came to tell you, mother, that I feel how right you were in endeavouring to hold fast the barrier which divides one class of society from another; I wished to own that you know the world well, mother, and that, as you often said, no one can with impunity despise the opinion of society.”

Madame Erichsen looked round rather triumphantly, the doctor shook his head, Alphonse seemed amazed, and Marianne gazed sorrowfully at her youngest brother. She knew of Arthur's love, and of all the fair hopes he had grounded on it, and she, with her tender woman's heart, felt that something dreadful must have happened, for only something of that kind could have induced Arthur to bend his naturally liberal views to the cautious, narrow-minded maxims of his mother.

Probably an explanation would have ensued if the old servant had not at that moment entered, to announce to Madame Erichsen that a lady had called who wished to speak to her on important business.

This was not the usual hour to receive visits, so Madame Erichsen asked, in surprise, "Who is the lady? Did she ask distinctly for me? Does she wish to speak to me alone?"

"She named you, madame, quite distinctly," said the servant; "and I don't believe she wishes to see you alone."

"She must give her name," said Madame Erichsen, after a pause.

"She does not choose to do so."

"Then I shall not admit her," said the old lady, with dignity. "Tell her so."

"The lady foresaw such a possibility," answered the servant, "for she told me she was resolved to see one of the family; and if not you, at all events my master or Madame Alphonse."

"How strange!" said Madame Erichsen. "I think we may admit her without violating any of the laws of propriety."

She made a sign to the servant, who went out, and in a moment returned and slowly opened the door.

Every eye was directed towards it, and for all—

except Arthur—an entire stranger appeared, who presented herself with much ease and elegance, bent her head slightly to the gentlemen, and then advanced gracefully to the sofa where Madame Erichsen was seated.

“What on earth can this mean?” thought the panic-struck Arthur. “Mademoiselle Therese!”

The banker, who prided himself on recognising a lady of distinction at once by her *tournure*, and who did not doubt that he saw before him a lady of the highest class, while he returned her greeting by a profound bow, rolled in an arm-chair, in which Mademoiselle Therese—for she it was—seated herself without any embarrassment.

Although the banker's lady discovered nothing suspicious in the appearance or manner of the stranger, she was more cautious than her husband. She answered her bow by a cold, formal bend, and then sat as perpendicular as if she had swallowed a bunch of pencils. Marianne had at a glance inspected the toilette of the lady, but found nothing suspicious or questionable in the taste of the white satin bonnet with one small white feather, nor in the graceful way she wore her shawl, nor in the colour of her gloves, nor the make of her pretty little *brodequins*.

Mademoiselle Therese seemed to wait to be questioned, and in the mean time she reconnoitred the

ground. A scarcely perceptible smile played about her mouth when she saw Arthur, who was sitting beside his mother in amazement.

"You wished to speak to me, madame?" said Madame Erichsen, at last. "Whom have I the pleasure——"

"That has nothing to do with the matter, madame," answered Therese.

"Still, I must really beg——"

The heart of the dancer beat more quickly, for she knew well that her name would be the signal for a violent and most unequal contest; but she was well provided with ammunition, and did not hesitate to open on the enemy.

"Though my name is not material, madame," repeated she, "and is probably quite unknown to you, I nevertheless have much pleasure in complying with your request that I should mention it. My name is Therese Selburg, and I am a dancer in the Royal Theatre."

The effect produced by these last words in this quiet family circle was amusing and yet terrible. The face of the banker's lady was for a moment quite distorted; she then passed her hand across her eyes as if to chase away a painful vision. But the fair one who had made her way into this circle was not to be dismayed by any such pantomime, and looked with perfect composure at the astonished faces round

her.

Marianne appeared the most alarmed—perhaps she rightly anticipated what might follow—and though she had resolved not to spare another scandal in the family, she now shrank from it. She glanced hastily at her husband, who stared from behind his spectacles, and though he forced a sneer, it was evident that he was far from comfortable.

The banker, who was at first provoked at having so assiduously rolled in the arm-chair, examined the young lady more closely, and thought, "She looks very pretty and nice; many a lady of degree would be too happy to be like her."

In the mean time the old lady had reflected what it was best to do. She would have preferred rising from her seat and sweeping out of the room majestically; but she felt this would be unwise, for she suspected the young lady must have strong grounds to induce her to venture on intruding herself on a family circle. She looked at her son Arthur, but he seemed quite at his ease. So she said, with a slight bend, "Mademoiselle, be so good as to inform me of the subject of your visit. The name of Selburg is quite strange to me."

Therese smiled, and said, "I believe, madame, that you certainly never before heard my name; and yet—some years ago—it was named in your presence, and by your daughter there. I have a sister, a poor girl, but honest and respectable, though

only a sempstress. She tried to obtain a situation which was then vacant in your family. She had good recommendations, and her appearance pleased your daughter."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Marianne.

"Then, madame, you have probably not forgotten also," continued the dancer, "that your husband—I believe that gentleman with spectacles—refused the situation to my sister not because there was anything against her, and as little because she was not a skilful workwoman, but simply because she had a sister who was a dancer, and with whom she might perhaps associate, which was not considered correct in so moral a house. The sister in question is now before you. I was then, however, too young and inexperienced to feel the full force of the insult offered to me and my poor parents."

"Mademoiselle!" said Madame Erichsen, severely.

"When I did fully understand it, I confess it did not assist in retaining me in the paths of virtue, for I thought, 'Your profession is sufficient to make every one treat you with contempt. Because you are poor and pretty, and dress with taste, you cannot fail to be a lost creature, especially as your mother and good friends are not in a condition to sing forth praises of your goodness and virtue to a circle of elegant acquaintances.' So I made no efforts to prevent things taking their natural course."

"But, mademoiselle," said the banker, "I do not see how this preface can lead to any subject interesting to us."

"You cannot believe me to be such a fool," answered Therese, the colour rising to her cheeks—for what she had just said had excited her—"as to speak about things which do not concern you."

"I should, indeed, be glad to know," said Alphonse, impertinently, "how it is that we have the honour of being at all connected with your sister's name or your own?"

"Opinions—not persons—are connected on this occasion," said the dancer, with a cool smile, "and opinions, too, that have undergone considerable alteration since that period." With these words, she turned direct to Herr Alphonse, and looked at him so fixedly, that he cast down his eyes and coloured.

Madame Erichsen sat there coughing and choking, quite red from her rising wrath. "In her whole life such a thing had never before occurred: this singular person had forced her way into the house, and ventured to talk about opinions with one of her family—her son-in-law, too—who, whatever his faults might be, had always restricted his conduct within the limits of morality and propriety."

"Mademoiselle," said she, in a very severe voice, "I think our acquaintance is too slight to discuss

opinions together. I must therefore request you to proceed to the real purpose of your visit, or to allow me——” rising partly from the sofa to express her meaning.

The doctor had exchanged glances with Arthur, and at the dancer's last words, Marianne's face had become scarlet.

“I think, mother,” said Edward, “that you ought to request Mademoiselle Selburg to explain what she means by her allusion to changed opinions.”

“Much obliged to you for your proposal, Herr Doctor,” said Therese, turning to him. “You certainly have a right to demand an explanation of my rather offensive words. I only wished to say,” continued she, slowly turning round her chair so as to fix her eyes on Alphonse, “that M. Alphonse, whose opinion it then was that it was not proper to have any one in his family whose sister was a dancer, has so changed his opinion, that he went much farther, and proposed himself as the protector of a dancer—a proposal which was followed by cruel consequences for the poor girl.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Arthur, horrified—for he began to suspect a dreadful connexion between his brother-in-law and the unhappy creature whose corpse he had that morning seen.

At this moment Madame Erichsen really looked as if some fearful spectre had arisen before her.

Her eyes were staring, her mouth open, and her face as pale as death, while her hand, which lay on the table, trembled. She had been listening attentively to Therese, but now she turned her eyes slowly on her son-in-law, who seemed all at once to have lost all self-command. His eyes wandered about; he was first pale, and then red; he shrugged his shoulders, and made an attempt to smile; then went a few steps towards the doctor, and then towards his wife, who had sunk down on the sofa, and buried her head in the cushions, sobbing.

With all her faults, Madame Erichsen was a very sensible woman, who seldom lost her presence of mind—and then only for a moment. She recovered herself instantly, sat more erect than ever, her cough sounding like distant thunder, and said composedly to Therese, “Proceed, mademoiselle.”

Alphonse approached the table hesitatingly, leaned his right hand on it, and said, in a bullying tone, “Madame, you choose to allow that person to proceed in relating things against me nearly affecting my honour. With your permission I will withdraw.”

“No! you shall remain,” cried Marianne, in a loud voice, springing up from the sofa. “Yes, you shall stay, hypocrite! and hear from a stranger what your poor wife had not courage to say of you.”

“Marianne! gently!” said her mother, with an

immovable countenance. The first shock was over, and nothing could now move the old lady to show emotion.

“What dreadful tales are these?” said the banker, clasping his hands. “Am I awake or dreaming?” He rose with difficulty, and went to the door to ascertain that it was fast shut.

Marianne at this moment was scarcely to be recognised. This gentle, timid woman, whom one stern look of her husband’s scared, and who took refuge in any corner from his frown, now resolutely advanced to him, rested her hand also on the table, and said, with flashing eyes, “This lady speaks the truth. You, whose every second word was morality and propriety—you, who could discover harm in the most innocent affair—you, who put an evil construction on the actions of every one—you, who spoke so haughtily of this profligate world, and the shocking vices of mankind—you are yourself such a sinner, and in so far worse, that you are a hypocritical sinner! Mademoiselle is right, and I beg her, as mamma has done, to continue her narrative. For me it is unnecessary,” said she, with a burst of tears, “for I know all.”

Alphonse made a last desperate attempt to regain the lost battle, saying, in that decided tone which had so often intimidated his wife, “Madame, for your want of tact and good feeling in speaking such

hateful things of your own husband before an impertinent, lying person, I will hereafter call you to account. As for the allegation itself, I declare it to be an infamous calumny, and am ready to maintain it to whoever shall dare to hint their belief in it."

He then looked defyingly round, and wished to alarm Therese by his furious looks. She, however, rose from her chair deliberately, advanced to him, and was about to make him a suitable answer, when his wife interposed, and held up a paper before her husband, at sight of which his features relaxed, and he involuntarily stepped back.

"Are you acquainted," said poor Marianne to Therese, "with the dancer Marie K——?"

"I did know her, but she is dead."

"Dead!" said Marianne, shrinking back.

"Dead!" said Alphonse, with every sign of horror in his face.

"Speak!" cried the doctor. "Is that the poor girl who was killed by that dreadful accident in the theatre?"

Therese made a sign of assent.

"Ah! she had a fall," said Alphonse, breathing again. "What have I to do with that?"

"Mademoiselle," said the old lady, "I beg you will speak."

"There is not much more to say," answered Therese, impatiently. "She is dead, and Dr.

Erichsen, who was called in, can give you all particulars. She died in consequence of that dreadful fall ; and the case is the more melancholy, that the misfortune is attributed to a young man whom Marie tenderly loved, and to whom she was shortly to have been married, and who heard at that moment of her supposed infidelity. In his agitation he let go the rope supporting the car—and you know the rest.”

Marianne shuddered and uttered a low cry.

“I was with her, and never left her for a moment till her death. She told me the whole melancholy history, and she made me faithfully promise to tell the cruel man who had persecuted her and made her miserable—nay, I may say who was her murderer—all these frightful details—not from a spirit of revenge, but in the hope that it might act as a solemn warning, and turn him from his sinful course. I accepted the commission,” added she, after a momentary pause ; “only, instead of speaking to you, sir, in private, I preferred doing so before those with whom you have hitherto passed as a model of virtue.” Alphonse, who had stood as if transfixed, now suddenly rushed out of the room without uttering a syllable.

“My task is finished,” said Therese, turning to the old lady, “and if I have offended you, I entreat your forgiveness.” She made a low curtsy to the others and turned to go away.

Madame Erichsen paused a moment, and then said, politely, "I thank you, mademoiselle; you have only done your duty." She rose and accompanied the dancer to the door with an air of composure and dignity.

As soon as the door was closed on the stranger, the old lady stood still for a moment as if stupified, then putting her hand to her forehead, she said, "Come, Marianne, I wish to speak to you." Both ladies left the room, and the gentlemen shortly did the same, not without much lamentation on the part of the worthy banker, who foresaw endless disagreeable domestic scenes, to which he had a particular aversion.

CHAPTER IX.

AUGUSTE RECEIVES A VISITOR.

SINCE the departure of Herr Beil, the head of the firm of Johann Christian Blaffer and Co. had engaged no other clerk. Auguste, the apprentice, was promoted to his place, without this promotion in the least benefiting him; on the contrary, it only gave him more to do, for his former occupations of packing and carrying about parcels were still continued, and the consequence was that everything went wrong.

Herr Blaffer was as much dissatisfied with the sister as with the brother. She had begun to speak very saucily to him, and would do nothing but what suited her humour. She incited Auguste to give him impertinent answers when found fault with, and she herself persisted in going out when she

chose, and remaining out as late as she thought fit, when Blaffer raged about the house like a possessed person, and yet, when she returned, received her with the utmost joy. He became thinner than ever, his face more emaciated, his walk more infirm, and, in fact, he was only the shadow of the former Blaffer. Perhaps we need not inform our reader that it was jealousy which had so changed the bookseller. He felt that he was deceived by Elise, but he never, with all his watching, could discover the truth. She had scarcely from the first attempted to conceal her aversion to himself. He felt certain that some one crept in and out of his house, but he was, like a spectre, invisible. Sometimes he thought he heard a door creak, or the sound of suppressed laughter; but when he started out of bed to listen all was again quiet, and he could hear nothing but the wind howling in the chimney. In vain had he tried to bribe the brother—either he knew nothing of his sister's doings, or he was cunning enough not to betray her. Blaffer might have sent away the girl, but he had not strength of mind to do so: he could not live without her. At last he resolved, after much thought, to sell his business for a good round sum and to

leave the city with Elise. Already he had offered to marry her, which she had resolutely refused, and this was the first thing that roused his suspicions. He placed all his hopes in taking her with him from the city; and as he had a good offer made him for his business, he accepted it at once, only stipulating that the sum should be paid down in gold.

To close this bargain and to hurry on the affair, Herr Blaffer had left the house, and Auguste was alone in the shop, seated at his desk, when he heard a knock at the door, and a man entered, whom the apprentice had never before seen. He was tall and stout, with a broad, full face, reddish hair, and a good-natured expression, not deficient, however, in energy and shrewdness. He was plainly dressed in a dark great-coat, and a thick stick in his hand. "I beg your pardon," said he, "for disturbing you, but I wish to speak a few words in private to Herr Blaffer's assistant."

Auguste jumped off the stool and presented himself as the sole assistant of Herr Blaffer.

"It is very possible," said the stranger, "but as my business is of considerable importance with this person, forgive me for wishing first to be thoroughly convinced that you are he."

"In that case," said Auguste, considerably offended, "you must wait till Herr Blaffer returns to identify me."

"Well, well," said the unknown, "be so good as to name to me the best friend you have ever had."

The apprentice stared in astonishment, but he immediately remembered his former companion the clerk, and called out, "My best and only friend is Herr Beil. Do you bring me tidings of him?"

"Herr Beil? exactly so," answered the other. "I do not bring you direct intelligence from him."

"And where is Herr Beil?—is he in this town? But yet he cannot be, or he would have come to see me himself."

"I don't doubt he would. And your supposition is correct; Herr Beil is not in the town, but he sends you a message by me."

"How glad I am!" cried Auguste; "I cannot say how glad. Ah, my dear Herr Beil! I hope he is getting on well?"

"Capitally; and he hopes to hear the same of you."

"I have stepped into his place," answered the apprentice, with an air of importance; "indeed, I conduct the whole business, as Herr Blaffer is constantly absent."

"Herr Beil will be rejoiced to hear this good news," said the other; "but I must now give you my message. May I beg you to come into the next room with me? My commission is rather a strange one, and I should not like any one in the passage to overhear me."

"Oh, certainly," said Auguste, highly flattered at receiving a secret message. "No one can hear us, but if you like I will go with you into the next room."

"I beg you will."

They then both went into Herr Blaffer's private room. The man looked at it while leaning on his stick, and said, "You have a capital place for business here. I suppose that door," pointing to one opposite, "leads to Herr Blaffer's study? Very convenient, indeed."

"No," answered Auguste, "it leads to the stairs and to a back door which opens into a court."

"Ah!" answered the stranger. "But now for my message. Herr Beil lived here for some time with you in an attic. He left this house in a stormy night and in a strange mood."

"Yes, indeed, that is true enough."

"You see how well I know everything. He left

the house in such a hurry that he forgot to take something with him."

"He did not say a word to me of it."

"Of course not; as he forgot it entirely, how could he mention it to you? But now I will tell you about it. Herr Beil left in the attic, in a corner which he minutely described to me, a purse with money."

"A purse with money? I never should have suspected such a thing."

"I dare say not; they were the savings of long years. He has commissioned me to fetch this purse. He would have come himself, but in the first place he is not here, and in the next, as you know well, the disagreeable circumstances under which he and his principal parted would make such a visit painful. You quite understand me?"

To judge from the puzzled face of the apprentice, this seemed to be by no means the case. He looked at the stranger with his mouth wide open, and he seemed not to be able to comprehend that Beil had left money in his garret. But the stranger maintained it, and offered to prove the fact to him, so that he must at last believe it.

"Have you a moment's time to spare to go up

with me to the attic?" said the latter. "But I should not like to meet Herr Blaffer. You understand. He was not on good terms with Herr Beil, so any friend of his would not be welcome."

"Don't be afraid of that," answered Auguste; "Herr Blaffer has business, and he will scarcely be home till dinner-time."

"Then, with your permission," said the other, with a dignified bow intended to be very imposing in Auguste's eyes, which it certainly was, "we will go up-stairs."

"Come along, then."

"*A propos*, young gentleman," said the other, with a paternal air, "don't take it amiss, but really you are a little incautious. You leave the strong-box open. In these days you cannot take too many precautions."

"Oh! thieves may amuse themselves there as much as they like," answered the apprentice, laughing, while he closed the door of the shop. "Herr Blaffer is far too knowing to leave his money below, where nobody sleeps. The real strong-box is under his bed always, and he keeps the key himself."

The stranger said, with much unction, "Herr

Blaffer is a wise and a worthy man. But let us go up-stairs, for my time is nearly up."

They proceeded up-stairs, and the visitor seemed quite delighted with the house. "What a handsome building, and so comfortable!" said he, repeatedly; "all is so well arranged! Of course that is the kitchen, leading to the street; here the shop and ante-room; to the right, probably where the store of books is kept. Have I guessed rightly, young gentleman?"

"Yes, quite right; there are two large rooms there for the *depôt* of books."

"Now I will give you a proof of how well I understand your master's habits. He likes quiet, especially at night. These rooms, containing books, look, I suppose, into the court behind, and above these, that his rest may not be disturbed, is the bedroom of Herr Blaffer."

"Right again," said Auguste. And as they were now on the first floor, he pointed to a door, and said, "That is his bedroom. Would you like to look in?"

"Oh! I would on no account take such a liberty; let us rather go up to the attics. I assure you, young sir, my time is precious to-day."

They proceeded and reached Herr Beil's former room. "Yes, that is the room," exclaimed the stranger, "just as he described it to me. So it was here the good Herr Beil lived ! It would make me quite melancholy if I had not the hope of seeing him again in a couple of days."

"How I wish I could see him, too," said Auguste. "But you will give me his address, won't you?"

"I would do so with the greatest pleasure, but he strictly forbade me to say where he lived. Particular circumstances compel his silence on this point, but he will shortly write to you. You may rely on that. Now you stay at the door, and you shall see how quickly I will find the purse."

Auguste was very anxious to see this, for he had still some doubts as to the property his friend had left behind ; and he was, therefore, not a little astonished when the stranger, having groped about for a short time near the window-sill, turned round suddenly, and triumphantly held up a small purse. He shook out the contents into his hand, and before the eyes of the astonished apprentice there sparkled a small heap of shining ducats.

"I never should have thought," said the latter, "that Herr Beil possessed such treasures. He was

always telling me of his poverty, and that he was poor and friendless, and alone in the world."

"Quite incomprehensible," muttered the other; "but as the money is before your eyes, there is no doubt of the fact. My commission is fulfilled, and, in thanking you heartily for your obligingness, I venture to express a wish of Herr Beil's. His circumstances have improved in the most wonderful manner, and through me he begs you will accept the half of this sum as a mark of his friendship."

"Oh no! no!" cried Auguste, while he looked eagerly at the money, "that is a large sum. How could I accept it? And through a stranger, too! If he had offered it to me himself it might have been different."

"Herr Beil knows your delicacy of feeling, and foresaw this possibility, so he said, 'Herr Brander'—my name is Brander—'be sure you urge my dear Auguste to grant me this proof of attachment, and to share this trifle with me, for in my present circumstances I do consider it a trifle. If he wishes to thank me, I will give him an opportunity to do so in person a few days hence.'"

"He is coming here?" said the highly delighted apprentice.

"He is coming," said Brander, as if touched by the young man's joy.

"Soon?"

"Very soon. Now that I see how sincere your happiness is at the idea of again embracing your long lost friend, I feel I may confide in you. Herr Beil is now in this city, and only awaits a favourable moment once more to embrace you."

"Here? Is it possible? May I go to see him?"

"Circumstances forbid this; but as he is most anxious to see you, and yet very unwilling to meet Herr Blaffer, he wishes you to consult with me as to how this can be managed."

"Nothing more easy," cried Auguste, delighted. "I will open the house door to him at night, which Herr Blaffer always carefully locks. He knows his way to this room thoroughly, and could find it even in the dark."

Here Brander appeared quite affected, his feelings overcame him, and he pressed the apprentice's hand, saying, "Ah! Beil was not deceived in your warmth of heart. He said, 'All my savings are for Auguste; and if he speaks with affection of me, don't give him the half, but the whole of them.' So no remonstrances, young man, no false shame; ac-

cept the purse, for I solemnly declare I will not take it away."

With these words, he forced the purse with so much energy into Auguste's hand, and rushed down the steps so quickly, that he saw it was in vain to withstand his entreaties. He therefore followed Herr Brander, who, with much tact, changed the subject of conversation, and admired the construction of the house.

"Admirably built," said he. "I suppose most of the rooms in the first floor open into each other?"

"I beg your pardon," answered Auguste; "the two rooms which Herr Blaffer inhabits have separate entrances, and so have those of my sister."

"So Herr Blaffer's room looks into the street," said the stranger. But this error Auguste quickly corrected by opening the door of Herr Blaffer's bedroom, to show that the windows looked into the court. Herr Brander merely looked in, and then went down stairs. At the house door he shook the young man's hand cordially, and went into the street. But he turned and said, "*A propos*, we had almost forgotten to settle some signal that you may know when to expect Herr Beil. How shall

we manage? Oh, do you see this gas-lamp? I suppose it burns every evening?"

"Yes, it is lighted regularly as soon as it is dark."

"Very well. Examine this lamp: if its light burns as usual you need not expect Beil, but when it is extinguished you will see him a few minutes afterwards. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Then I will gently open the street-door."

"Yes; and immediately go back to your room—you understand? The joy of meeting again might cause quite a scene on the stairs, and disturb Herr Blaffer."

"Rely on me."

"I will do so indeed, excellent young man," said Herr Brander. He left the house and went hastily along the street, keeping close to the houses.

Auguste returned into the shop, and counted over his little treasure—the savings of the worthy Beil.

CHAPTER X.

JOHANN CHRISTIAN BLAFFER ALONE.

THE day after the unimportant circumstance we have just mentioned, Herr Blaffer was alone in his shop, seated at his desk. He was evidently in no very agreeable frame of mind—he had aged very much latterly—indeed, he had had a good deal to annoy him. In disposing of his business he had found it considerably depreciated in the eyes of the world, and had been obliged to sell it several thousand gulden cheaper than he had expected. He had fared equally ill in selling his house. All sorts of faults had been discovered in it, and as Herr Blaffer insisted on being paid ready money, he was obliged to make a sacrifice here also; but, after all was cleared off, there remained to the worthy proprietor a very pretty round sum of twenty thousand

gulden in gold and bank-notes, which he carefully locked in the strong-box under his bed.

But an annoyance of another kind had tended to put him out of humour, and when he thought of it his face became more repulsive and gloomy than ever. Sometimes he thought with satisfaction of his twenty thousand gulden in hard cash in his strong-box, and formed projects of leaving the city and taking Elise with him. But then the remembrance of what he had lately heard made him grind his teeth with rage. His maid had told him that Elise had a lover, and that she deceived him. Buried in these painful thoughts, Herr Blaffer did not hear some one knocking repeatedly at the door; at last there were three such loud strokes, that he started up and called out, "Come in!" when Herr Arthur Erichsen appeared.

"I fear I disturb you," said the painter.

"Oh no, most happy to see you," said the bookseller, stretching out his long spider-like legs to get down from his high stool; "I beg you will be seated. I see you very seldom, Herr Erichsen."

"Not often," answered he; "but our illustrations have gone on all the same, and been punctually delivered."

"Yes, and most successful they have been."

"I have come to tell you," said Arthur, "that I am setting off on a long journey to Switzerland and Italy, so I cannot go on with the illustrations, but I have engaged a friend to execute them who has so much talent that you will be no loser by the exchange."

Herr Blaffer, who having sold all interest in the business, cared very little about the illustrations, said, carelessly: "Oh! you are going to travel! An easy matter for you! You have only to pack up, get letters of credit, break all ties, and set off!"

Arthur sighed, and said: "Ties may be broken; but whether that is an easy matter is another thing."

"Ah! I understand!" said Herr Blaffer, with a sneer. "Pardon my indiscretion, but I should think the leave-taking in the Balken-Gasse would be rather painful!"

The painter shook his head, and answered, without looking at Blaffer: "I know what you mean; but, believe me, no one in the Balken-Gasse cares for my departure!"

"No one?" said Blaffer.

"No one, I assure you," said Arthur, gravely.

"Well, I am surprised!" said Blaffer. "Did you not arrange with me to give a vast increase of salary to old Staiger? Surely you expected some gratitude from the daughter for that?"

"I do assure you," said Arthur, indignantly, "that neither the old man nor his daughter have the slightest idea that this increase was owing to me." He then stood up, and said, "Adieu, Herr Blaffer; when I return with my portfolio full of sketches we may perhaps publish them with a book of traveller's wonders!"

After taking leave of Arthur, the bookseller paced up and down his shop, and said to himself, "There is another who has also made unpleasant discoveries, and yet he is young and handsome; but now that he is leaving the country, I will take good care to waste no more money on that old Staiger." So he seated himself at his desk, and wrote the following note to Herr Staiger:

"SIR,—The times are so bad for our business that we must beg you no longer to expect employment from us. 'Uncle Tom' is completed, and we find ourselves unable to fulfil the project we once entertained—but for which no contract was signed

—for the translation of a new work. Pray receive the assurance of our esteem.

“JOHANN CHRISTIAN BLAFFER AND CO.”

The writer looked quite pleased at the grand flourish attached to his signature, closed the shop, and went up to his room.

Some hours later Auguste was seated at the window of his attic, staring into the street, and watching the lamps being lighted one by one. The one opposite the house burned bright and clear, and however sharply the apprentice watched, he could discover no one apparently disposed to extinguish this particular gas-lamp, and thus to indicate to him the eagerly expected visit of Herr Beil. It continued for two hours to stream brightly on the iron lamp-post, and to cast a wide circle of light on the street. But what was that? Suddenly the lamp was extinguished, and yet Auguste had seen no one near it! How his heart beat! He hastened to the door of his room, and listened; but there was no sound in the house—all was still below. The bookseller had gone to bed, and as Auguste was listening he could hear him distinctly coughing in his room. He waited a long half-hour, and then

he slid down, holding by the banisters. He had often practised this manœuvre when he had overslept himself, and did not wish the bookseller to hear him. When he was down stairs, he glided quietly to the house-door, turned the key in the lock twice, shoved back the heavy bolts, and then crept up, according to orders, to his room in the attics. Each minute he was obliged to wait here appeared an eternity to him. He leaned his ear against the key-hole and strained every nerve to listen. All was still, even Herr Blaffer no longer coughed, and was probably asleep. At last Auguste heard a noise, but it did not seem to come from below, but from the roof. What could it be? In the next room, where his sister used to sleep, he now thought he heard a person moving; some one seemed to be creeping on the floor, and groping along the walls as if trying to find the door. That could not possibly be Herr Beil, for he would of course come in at the door; but yet there was no mistake, for he distinctly heard something moving. The handle of the door was softly turned, but before it could be opened Auguste had the presence of mind to extinguish his light. He stared out into the passage, while his heart beat so loudly that he feared

its sound might betray his presence, and he had a strange feeling at the roots of his hair as if each particular hair was slowly pulled. He thought of robbers, murderers, and ghosts, but chiefly of the last, for the being that had opened the door and hovered along the passage could be no living mortal. He heard no step, he only saw a shadow glide towards the stairs and then vanish in the darkness. If he had not every moment expected Herr Beil, and consequently feared to alarm the house, he certainly would have cried out for help. He hastened back to his window, and looked at the dark gas-lamp, and then into the street, to see if there was no trace of his expected friend. But who can describe his surprise when he turned round again and perceived at the door of his room a bright light, which so completely dazzled his eyes that he was unable to distinguish the bearer of it. Could that be Herr Beil? But why then enter the room in that silent, strange way? The nerves of the poor apprentice were so excited, that instead of asking any questions he covered his face with his hands and sank into a chair.

The lantern at the door, or rather the person who carried it, advanced into the room, and a voice,

which was certainly not that of Herr Beil, and yet did not seem quite strange to Auguste, said: "You have kept your promise—I am much obliged to you."

"Heaven be praised!" thought Auguste, letting his hands fall, "it talks now, and no longer glides in that spectral manner through the house." He then ventured to look up, and recognised with astonishment the features of Herr Brander, who had announced to him his friend's visit.

"You are surprised to see me here," said the latter, "but it could not be otherwise, for Herr Beil is prevented coming; so I thought it right to let you know that you might not expect him."

"I am much obliged to you," answered the apprentice, "but permit me to ask you one question. Why did not you come in at the door and come upstairs instead of climbing over the roof into the house?"

"Did you hear any one climb over the roof?" said the other, eagerly.

"Though you went along so quietly I heard you, and saw you go down stairs."

"Ah! he is come already," muttered Brander; "he knows the way well enough—love taught him

that. You are wrong," said he, turning to Auguste, "I came up the stairs."

"Then who was the other?" said the apprentice, who began to feel rather uncomfortable.

"The other is a good friend of mine and Herr Beil's also, who has a little business to transact here."

"At this hour?" answered Auguste, who, though rather late, began to suspect he had been very foolish to open the door at night to strangers.

"Yes, at this hour, my good young man," answered Brander. "He is at this moment transacting his little affairs, but has time to fix his eyes on you out of his dark corner."

"Where?" asked Auguste, looking round in terror.

"That is no matter. Indeed, I have no time for long explanations; but listen to me attentively for a moment. You expect Herr Beil, but Herr Beil is prevented coming either to-day, to-morrow, or any other day; he is very desirous to see you, however, so he will let you know soon how this is to be managed. But one thing I insist upon: you must stay quietly in your room, shut your door, and don't trouble your head about what you may by chance hear going on in the house."

"Mercy on me!" cried Auguste, in a piteous tone, "you have some evil designs; but I will not take any part in them—I will cry out for help, and wake my master."

"Just try it!" said the other, in a threatening voice. "Call the police if you choose—I will stay quietly here, and let myself be taken prisoner along with you—I can prove that I paid you well to open the street door. Don't be a child," continued he, as he saw that the apprentice looked aghast; "believe me we mean no harm to any one; but if when I leave this room you choose to make a noise, or call for help, or any such follies, don't forget that the mysterious being you saw glide along the wall is close to you, and that at the first sound you are a dead man."

Auguste was too terrified to be able to utter a syllable—he looked round with horror—then suddenly the light of the dark lantern was no longer visible, but he felt the pressure of the stranger's hand shaking him by the shoulder, and whispering, "If you love your life make no noise."

Before Herr Blaffer had gone to rest on this evening he had for a long time walked up and down his room, sunk in thought. His affairs were

finally arranged, his money was safe in his strong-box, and he intended quitting the city with Elise, the only being he had ever loved; for her sake every sacrifice was light, but the doubt of her truth was the one dreadful idea always persecuting him. At last he went to rest, and after tossing about uneasily for some time, he fell asleep, but a disturbed sleep, in which evil dreams harassed him. He drew a deep breath, and opened his eyes. He listened, as he often did when he awoke at night. Could he be deceived? Was not some one outside moving in the passage? In an instant he was out of bed, and standing at the door of his room, which he had lately left open, lest the sound of the lock should betray to others that he was listening. Every evening he put out his candle, and then left the door a little ajar, that he might see through the crevice.

So it was this evening, and as he stood there trembling with expectation, he saw Elise standing at the door of her room, and stretching out her hand joyfully to her lover, with a happy smile. Then she drew him into the room, closed the door, and bolted it.

Blaffer's first impulse was to rush forwards and

burst open the door, but he thought of a better plan. The man within was probably stronger than himself, and as he was resolved to have revenge—a bloody revenge—he must seek for a weapon. Where was anything of the kind to be found in the house? He thought for a few seconds, then went back into his room, threw on a few clothes hastily, and went down stairs on his bare feet to the shop, the door of which he noiselessly opened. There, in a corner beside the scales, lay the large sharp packing-knife. When he seized its cold handle he shuddered. He felt as if he saw shapeless figures in the dark, and as if the floor was giving way under him; and as he tried to find his way back he was obliged to support himself against the wall, and to rest for a minute not to sink down. Of all his confused senses only one remained clear and entire—that of hearing; and now he heard creeping footsteps—it must be he to whom the girl had opened her door; and yet a moment's reflection showed him that the steps he heard were in his own room, directly above the shop. He listened still more eagerly. He heard a low, grating sound—yes, he was certain of the fact!—a heavy lock was being forced up-stairs. Heavens and earth! it must be his strong-box! He started

out of his listening attitude, he strove to reach the door, and just as he got to the passage he heard a window opened up-stairs. He looked up, and saw the body of a man moving down suspended by a rope. "Thieves! thieves!" screamed Herr Blaffer, with all his strength. And rushing to the window, he threw it up, and as at the moment this man was hanging by the rope just opposite the window, he plunged the large knife with all his strength into his body, on which the man instantly let go the rope and fell groaning to the ground. Unluckily for himself Herr Blaffer could not resist looking out after his fallen enemy; but he only stretched out his head for one second, for the next he fell back heavily into the room, stupified by a tremendous blow on the back of his head, and he lay motionless on the floor.

The apprentice had remained trembling in the corner of his garret. He had several times started up with the intention of hastening down stairs, but each time the excess of his fear held him back. He felt sure that the instant he went out into the passage he would immediately be knocked down. He had perfectly well heard some one leaving his master's room—probably Herr Blaffer himself going

down to the shop. Afterwards he heard other steps, which seemed to die away in the bedroom—perhaps it was the bookseller returned. A window was suddenly thrown up, and the voice of his master was heard calling out “Thieves! thieves!”

Auguste now ventured into the passage, intending to go down stairs, when he heard whispering voices below—those of his sister and a man. Who could it be? Perplexed by all these mysteries he leaned over the banisters and listened. Two persons were slipping down stairs, through the passage to the street door, and he distinctly heard the latter close, the lock snap, and all was as still as death in the house.

Slowly, pausing on every step, the apprentice crept down stairs. The silence in the house terrified him. At last he reached the kitchen, next to which the old maid slept in a closet. She had heard nothing of the noise, and was difficult to wake. Auguste had closed the door cautiously, and not till a candle was lighted and the maid ready to accompany him did he venture again into the passage.

The door of the shop stood open, and Herr Blaffer lay on the floor, scarcely breathing, but with no external injury. The blow on the head had stu-

pified him, but he soon recovered; and when he tried to recollect what had occurred, and when the dreadful event recurred to his memory, he rushed up-stairs, groaning, to ascertain the extent of his misfortune.

This could not be greater, and was to him quite overwhelming. The door of Elise's room stood open—and she was gone. He tottered back into his room with faltering steps, and scarcely dared to cast a look at his strong-box. It was empty! He was utterly ruined, and all he had in the world had been stolen from him.

When the police next morning were informed of the event, and repaired to the place, the president himself considered it of so much importance that he was present at the examination. Herr Blaffer, whom the blow had cast on a sick bed, told without reservation all he knew.

Auguste, on the contrary, had thought fit entirely to pass over Herr Brander's visit, the story of the purse, and his having opened the door of the house; but neither the president nor his clever secretary were likely to be imposed upon by such a weak youth as the apprentice. He was cross-examined till he was fairly driven into a corner, and when the

president, in a solemn tone, represented to him that it would be considered a crime to conceal anything from the police, he confessed the whole story; indeed, he was obliged at last, with many tears, to give up the name of Herr Beil as the friend he had expected.

Herr Blaffer of course gave the worst possible account of his former clerk, which caused the president to order a description of his person to be instantly taken, and this, with his peculiar appearance, was by no means difficult.

The window by which the thief had let himself down, and also the court, were closely examined, and on the soft ground of the latter there were traces enough of what had happened. It was evident a human body had fallen on this spot; there were marks of blood and footsteps all round, showing that several persons had lifted the wounded man over the wall into the street. The whole ground was trampled over by many footmarks, and as one of the policemen in his zeal was measuring the length and breadth of some of these, he discovered a paper, which had been nearly trodden into the damp earth. As at such a time everything is of importance, he picked it up carefully and gave it to

the secretary of his excellency, who opened it, and after glancing at it, his dry, official face lighted up with surprise and pleasure: "Your excellency," said he, as he gave the paper to the president, "here is an undoubted proof of the assertion which I long ago ventured to make, that in this town there exists a well-organised band of depredators, led by a powerful and hitherto cautious hand. This paper contains instructions for breaking into this house, in which all is minutely ordered."

His excellency eagerly seized the dirty crumpled paper. In very indistinct and half-effaced characters there was written on it, "Two, Six, Eight, and Ten shall be so disposed as to surround the house, while One shall enter through the open door. The master is ready to carry off the girl; he has all his money and papers in the strong-box. A noise at her door must cause him to leave his room. If he breaks open the door, it rests with the young man to hold him fast till the business is over. No violence is to be used; on the contrary, if serious obstacles arise, the whole affair is to be postponed."

"There is no longer a doubt of the fact," said the president, when he had finished reading it aloud. "The chief thing is now inviolable silence on the

matter for the present. It is an affair which must be well reflected on and wisely guided. Our first step must be to find out where Herr Beil lives." They all then left the house, having, however, forced the poor wretched apprentice to accompany them for fear his talking should be any impediment to the discovery of the housebreaker.

CHAPTER XI.

GENERAL AND PRESIDENT.

WE must now repair to the apartments of the old Baron von Weiss, and we find him deep in conversation with an old friend of his—our recent acquaintance, the worthy president of police. As we enter the room we hear the spiteful old baron say, “My good friend, I am an old soldier, and go straight to the point. I beg you will listen to me attentively. You know there is a skeleton in every house, which we avoid looking at, but which does not the less exist, and seldom unknown, too, to the public!”

The president bowed in silence.

“Generally,” continued he, “it is relations who cause annoyances, or undutiful children, or false friends. None of these things trouble me. I have

always enjoyed favour at court, and have got on rapidly in my profession. My fortune is large enough to grant me every luxury. I lived in happiness and peace till one fine day the devil put it into my head to take a wife."

"Oh!" said the president, "you must be jesting, general!"

"No jest, but sad earnest. The fact is, she was very pretty, and I was an old fool. You know her, president! A handsome creature, and the world says charming, clever, and attractive."

"And they only do her justice in saying so."

A bitter sneer crossed the features of the old gentleman, but he went on coolly:

"Well, my wife—this angel of gentleness, uprightness, integrity, and whatever else you choose—has lately given me cause for great mistrust. At first I tried to suppress the feeling. I was provoked with myself, and I can't quite say on what I grounded my suspicions—on a glance, a word, a note, a strange acquaintance; perhaps much was entire imagination on my part, but every day I perceived more clearly that something mysterious had occurred in the life of my wife—that she had committed some crime against me and wished to conceal it."

"My dear friend," said the president, in a soothing tone, "do not be offended, but really it must be all fancy—the baroness's mode of life is so pure and good, her whole conduct is as clear and transparent as crystal."

"What you say may be all very true," answered the general, "so far as regards her present life, but I am thinking of the past. From thence comes the gloomy tone, the one dark thread interwoven with her very existence, which she cannot snap asunder, and which she constantly strives to conceal by her talent and amiability. But I am now on the right scent."

"You alarm me!"

"I have never prevented my wife walking, or driving, or visiting where she pleased. I certainly thought her too fond of visiting. All the racket tired me, and I endeavoured to check this; but when I saw that she would persist in remaining out for hours, I thought it odd, and I watched her!"

"A dangerous measure, my good general."

"One day she went to one of our largest shops, stopped her carriage at the door, went in at the front door, but out again at the back, so that my

people imagined she was occupied for hours in making purchases."

"And was she not?"

"What! do you not hear that she left the shop? She took a hackney-coach and drove to a small street; she entered a poor-looking house, went to the first *étage*, and there she met——"

"Oh! general!"

"There she met a boy of six years old, whom she fondly caressed."

"A boy!"

"A boy, whom she clasped in her arms, whose face she covered with tears and kisses—whom she pressed to her heart with all a mother's love."

"But, general, you really quite perplex me. What has she to do with the boy? Whose boy is it?"

"It is the black thread in the life of my wife, of which I already told you. Whence the boy and his nurse suddenly came I know as little as you do. I was at that time on the point of applying to you to assist in getting hold of the child, but all at once the child and nurse disappeared."

"Ah! general, if you had followed your first impulse, and addressed yourself to me," said the

chief of the police, "neither nurse nor child would have escaped. It is not permitted that any one should reside in this town without permission from the police. It is I who say so—the head of the police!"

A slight smile was visible on the withered old face of the general at these pompous words. "The error may be repaired," said he. "I have now an idea where the boy is to be found."

"I rejoice to hear it. It is remarkably unpleasant to hear of such occurrences taking place unknown to the police."

"I must own the child was so carefully hid that I had little chance of finding him, had not a person called on me to say that, for a certain sum, he would take me to the boy. Of course the man is a scamp. He is now here."

"And does this person know he is to appear before the president of the police?"

"Certainly not. I carefully avoided giving him any hint of such a thing."

"Very good. I will tell you at the first glance what kind of person your informer is. Has the baroness any idea that her—I mean the boy—is discovered?"

"Not the slightest," answered the general. "A pretty scene we should have in that case! A short time ago she was in a constant state of alarm and nervous irritability, but of late she has become composed and secure. She imagines she is safe in the possession of her beloved boy." At these last words the general bit his lips violently, then opened the door of the next room, and said some words to his valet.

The president placed himself in the recess of a deep window, so that the curtain shaded his features.

The door opened, and a man came in, who remained standing at the door with his hat in his hand, looking shy and frightened. He was pale and shabby; and when we mention that he had a very hypocritical air, had on a threadbare black coat, and was constantly pulling up his yellow shirt-collar, there can be no doubt that we see before us our old acquaintance Herr Strauber.

"Come nearer," said the general. "I have desired you to come here to tell you that I will pay you the sum you demand, but I request you to make your statement in the presence of one of my friends. Do you agree?"

Herr Strauber threw a hasty glance at the window

in which the president was standing, but the curtain hid his features entirely.

"Why not?" said the rogue, after a pause. "But as your excellency promised to conceal my name, your friend must also agree to this condition."

"Of course," answered the general. "I suppose you wish to have your money first?"

"Not at all," said the president. "This person must first give some proof that he really possesses the information you are to pay for."

To people like Herr Strauber, with an evil conscience, and who thus live in a constant state of alarm, it is always very disagreeable to hear a voice and not be able to see the person who speaks. In vain he tried to catch a glimpse of the gentleman behind the curtain; so he said, "I am ready to tell all I know."

"Pray where did the child formerly live, and how did he come to his present home?" said the general.

Herr Strauber, when it flashed across him that he might be drawn in inadvertently to make some allusion to a certain person, shuddered, for of this person he had a most mysterious dread and awe; but he resolved to be very cautious, and boldly said,

"The boy lived in the E'schen-Strasse with a certain Frau Fischer, who was his nurse. His relations, whom I don't know, thought it advisable to remove him."

"On what account?" asked the general.

"I don't know. The nurse remained in the same house, but the boy was brought, through the intervention of a third person, to an establishment for children, where I believe he was very comfortable."

"Exactly so," said the general. "And the child, you told me, one day mysteriously disappeared from this same establishment?"

"Who was the person who conducted this boarding-house for children?" asked the president.

Herr Strauber coughed in an embarrassed manner, pulled up his shirt-collar, and after a pause said, "The name is of little consequence, especially as the master of this excellent establishment died a short time ago, deeply lamented by all his nurslings."

The president advanced suddenly out of the recess of the window, and when he approached Herr Strauber and fixed his eyes steadily on him, that worthy appeared to lose all presence of mind, his knees trembled, and his pale, unwholesome face be-

came quite livid. He had instantly recognised the head of the police, and the idea suddenly occurred to him that his own safety was in no small danger.

The president exchanged a look with the general, then looking at the terrified Strauber, he said, in a stern voice, "The man's name was Schwemmer"—and turning to the general—"one of the most thorough scoundrels that ever lived; indeed, I feel convinced that the same rabble were in the habit of meeting there who frequent the Fuchsbau."

Herr Strauber affected great astonishment, and said, "I never suspected such a thing, your excellency. I always considered it a most respectable house. I only went there to inquire about the boy. When I think my good name might have suffered, I feel how easily the innocent may be entrapped!"

"Come, go on, and finish your story," said the general, holding up purposely a bunch of bank-notes, a bait at which Strauber instantly snapped.

"I heard by chance," said Strauber, "that you were looking for the boy, and in the hope of a reward I offered to give you his address. Your excellency knows the Schilder-Strasse?" continued he. "At No. 36 you will find the child with his former nurse, Frau Fischer, and a tutor whose name is Beil."

“The president started. Here was the very man whom he was anxiously searching for.

The general said impatiently, “Here is your money,” which Herr Strauber eagerly pocketed, quickly backed out at the door, and ran down stairs as fast as he could; and not till he had gone through several streets did he venture to take out his packet of money, and then hurried on to the railway station. He thought of a pleasant journey, bracing winter air, of the trees and houses he should see as the train flew past, and of a comfortable lodging at night, where he would enjoy a capital supper in a warm room, where the town, the police, the Fuchsbau, and even *he* would be no longer a bugbear, and where, drinking a good glass of wine, he could quietly form his projects for the future.

So thought Herr Strauber, but he little dreamt of the gloomy fate which stalked behind him—inexorable Destiny—this time in the shape of a blue-coated official with a three-cornered hat.

The president approached the general, who had sunk into an arm-chair after Strauber left the room, and said in a voice of sympathy, “I am much distressed, my dear friend, to tell you that the boy’s tutor, Beil, has been named to me as a member of a

widely organised band of thieves, who broke last night into a house and carried off a large sum of money. I must do my duty and seize both the tutor and the boy."

"Do so," said the general; "it is your duty."
They then separated.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOULDER-KNOTS.

Two great masked balls are usually given every year at court, and though perhaps no one is particularly amused with them, still they are looked forward to with more interest and curiosity than other balls. It is a change from the everlasting monotony of dinners and breakfasts, court concerts, and large and small balls. Things often occur there which furnish conversation for some days, and there are a variety of costumes to admire and to criticise. Even the grand chamberlain, who had trouble and anxiety enough at one of these *fêtes*, did not dislike them twice a year; it was like new uniforms, arms and standards to the military. Here there were state liveries, the hand-

somest rooms, the most brilliant chandeliers, and the most splendid service of plate. A few days before these balls at court, the part of the palace where the kitchens were resembled a hive with a swarm of bees buzzing in and out. The cook's apprentices glowed with zeal and cuffs, but it was dangerous to attempt an entrance into the sacred sanctum where the chief of the culinary staff composed his sauces and *entrées*. His subordinates crossed the threshold in fear and trembling, and esteemed themselves fortunate if they could bring away a *casserole* without a good box on the ear.

Chandeliers were lighted in all the salons, the stairs covered with carpeting, carefully arranged by the head servants in the palace, as well as the splendid plate which adorned the buffets. The grand chamberlain himself was more grave and pompous than ever on such a day, but gladly anticipating the moment when all would be happily over, and when the royal personages would retire to their apartments, weary but satisfied.

The discussion among those invited was always very eager on the subject of costume, and as on such occasions there was great mystery observed, and constant surprises prepared, the rooms where

tailors, maids, and sempstresses assiduously laboured were always fast closed against the uninitiated. On the day of the ball the confusion began to subside, and quiet and order to be restored—the ominous pause before a storm. Even the tyrant of the kitchen had become less ferocious, for now no more could be done, and everything must take its chance—the work was completed, whether successful or not. But in the rooms of the court ladies there was a greater press of work than ever, especially in those of the suite of the duchess, who had prepared a little surprise. According to the programme she and her ladies were to appear at the ball in the train of her majesty. The duchess did not change this arrangement, but she chose first to enter the ball-room masked, and amuse herself by talking to some of the guests in her unknown character. She had chosen the costume of a Sybil, and her ladies were to surround her in the fantastic attire of her assistants, or rather of her ministering spirits. This project she only confided to them two days before the ball, with the strictest injunctions to the most inviolable secrecy, and a sketch was given to each of the dress they were instantly to prepare.

All were therefore as busy as possible, and as it

was a dark, foggy day, they had already, in Fräulein Eugenie's room, let down the thick curtains and lighted the lamps. Chairs and tables were covered with various materials of silk and gauze, open band-boxes on the floor were displaying their varied contents — artificial flowers, ribbons, feathers. Two girls were seated at a work-table in a corner of the room, who had spread out a long veil of grey gauze, which they were busy covering with silver stars. One of these girls was pale, delicate, and slender, her thick hair wound in plaits round her head. The other, who appeared some years older, was strong and healthy-looking, and her complexion olive. Her bright black eyes, and rather saucy-looking red lips, gave her a somewhat bold expression of countenance.

The pale girl sewed busily, while the other, leaning back in her chair, placed one of her feet on a footstool and contemplated her work with considerable satisfaction. In one hand she held a threaded needle, and in the other a silver star, and said, laughing, how much she would like to be a lady of degree, and to appear in the brilliantly lighted ball-room in such a splendid dress.

Her companion did not answer, so the other

began to sew on the star, and, looking up, continued: "Do you know it would not be difficult for us to see the ball, Henriette? We should only have to get a couple of dominos, which would be easy enough in the palace, and then walk in boldly?"

"You don't become any wiser, Nanette," answered the other, shaking her head, but smiling. "I really do believe you would not hesitate to do so!"

"And why not? We ought to enjoy life as long as we can. But you are so very sober and steady!"

"I do my duty as well as I am able."

"No one can deny that; and your lady could not have a better maid than you—always at home, always working, and as close as the grave. You are quite a pattern!"

"If you really think so, Nanette," said Henriette, archly, "you had better follow my example a little more, and change your conduct in some respects."

"What! change still further?" exclaimed Nanette, in pretended astonishment. "Am I not quite a different being since we first met that evening at the Fuchsbau?"

"Oh! don't allude to that dismal house; when I hear the name it makes me shudder!"

"Yes, it was often not pleasant there; but it had its good side too. I feel now very like a caged bird; and when I sometimes look out at the fields, or hear by chance an organ in the streets, such sadness and longing seize me that I could weep. Indeed, Henriette, I don't know why I am so silly as to be guided by you, and do all you tell me. If you were not here, I can tell you I would long ago have taken my harp and gone back to enjoy a free, independent life, and the charms of nature."

"I cannot understand your feeling thus," said Henriette. "Have you not all you want here? The ladies for whom you work like you, they laugh at your merry ways and speeches, and often, when you choose to sing instead of sewing, they make you an additional present instead of scolding you. You have earned a good sum, and can put by something for your marriage, of which you sometimes talk."

Nanette smoothed back her hair, and said, "The caged bird has all that too. He lives in a pretty house, has plenty to eat and drink, and can sing too; but only so long as his mistress pleases, for often when he is in a merry mood, and begins chirping or singing loudly, a cloth is hung over his

cage to stop his mirth. As for my marriage, that is an old story. You know I told you I had a lover whom I gave up when I began a new life; but I often think of him, and never shall forget him. The valet here would marry me, but he is so terribly tame and proper—he combs his hair so smooth and flat, and has such a pompous face—so!”

At these words she made such a comical grimace, and so like the man, that Henriette could not help laughing. “Come, make haste,” said she, “for my lady will soon be here, and we have a great many silver stars to sew on.”

“Nonsense! Mademoiselle won’t be home yet. I know where she is,” said Nanette, laughing slyly.

“Where then?”

“At Major von S——’s. You know I work there very often, and I never was there yet that your lady did not arrive—and as surely as the Amen follows the sermon, then——”

“Well! what do you mean?”

“Count Fohrbach—— But you know all about it better than I do. Pray when is the marriage to take place?”

“I know nothing about it,” said Henriette, in a decided tone.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. They are to be married early in the spring, and are to travel. Ah! you lucky creature, you are to go with them; and I—I am to remain alone in this dull, dismal town! No, dear Henriette, it's no use asking me to stay."

"I think I heard a knock," said Henriette, looking up.

"I heard nothing."

"Yes! there it is again!"

"I hear. Who can it be? Come in!"

"You are very incautious," whispered Nanette. "You know we are not to admit any one. Luckily I bolted the door. See, they are trying in vain to open it."

"But what shall we do?" said Nanette. "We must have been overheard speaking, so we must at least see who it is."

"But it may be some one my mistress does not wish to admit."

"If I go to the door," said Nanette, "no one shall come in unless I choose, I can tell you; I should just like to see any one try." So saying, Nanette rose, tossed her head, and on the knock being repeated, called out, in a loud voice, "Do be quiet; I am coming!" She reached the door,

shoved back the bolt, and opened it a little, so as to be able to see into the passage; but it was so violently pushed, that Nanette required all her strength not to be shoved away. "What does this mean?" cried she, angrily. "Who dares to——"

But she did not finish her sentence. The girl, usually so courageous, shrank back with as much terror as if she had seen a spectre in the passage, and rushing back into the room she sank into a chair, speechless.

The door had remained open, and Henriette, who had started up in fear at her companion's strange conduct, saw in the half-dark passage a figure wrapped in a wide cloak. The head was uncovered, and when she saw the brilliant eyes, a dreadful remembrance struck her so forcibly, that she was obliged to lean against the table for support. She recognised the peculiar glance, the tall, slender figure she had seen but once, and since only in her dreams.

The figure entered the room, and as he did so, he said to the harp girl: "I beg you will close the door; I wish to speak a few words to your companion." Then turning to Henriette, he said, with a smile, "So you have a *protégée*, and have induced your former protectress to enter into service also?

You might have mentioned it to me. But, indeed, you don't seem to approve of reports, for yours every day become more meagre; so I come to refresh your memory, otherwise I do believe you would have forgotten me entirely."

"Never, never!" said the startled girl.

"You don't show much zeal for us," said he, smiling; "and yet I have placed you in a position which may well be considered advantageous. But that is the way of the world—people easily forget benefits; but one thing I beg you will remember, which is, that my hand is always near, and that I can grasp or crush you as I choose. But enough," continued he, in a gentler tone, "I have not come either to reproach you or to show you mistrust; on the contrary, I will give you a proof of my confidence by asking you to do me a small favour, which you will not refuse."

"I am in your power," answered Henriette, sadly, without looking up. "I know that well, and I must obey your commands. You can force me to do so."

"I would prefer your doing so voluntarily this time; besides, nothing evil is required from you. Attend to me!"

"I hear," said Henriette, with tears in her eyes.

"To-night there is to be a masked ball in the palace. The court will go there about ten o'clock, when a little masked *divertissement* is to take place, which they have arranged among themselves; but previous to this the duchess and her ladies are to appear disguised in the ball-room. Your young lady also—there lies part of her costume," said he, pointing to the silver stars. "At the ball, however, Mademoiselle Eugenie is to be one of the maids of honour of the queen. I see her dress also for that, a dark blue dress, with white ribbons. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir, it is so," said Henriette.

"Listen to me attentively. You are to go to a room near the ball-room with your young lady's second dress, about ten o'clock. Before taking her dark blue dress there, you must cut off these white ribbons and substitute these. He drew forth a small parcel, tore off the paper, and gave the astonished waiting-maid some neatly-made shoulder-knots of blue, green, and silver. "It is only a little surprise for your mistress," continued he; "you must not think there is any harm intended; but you will take care that Mademoiselle Eugenie has no idea of it,

and you must arrange so that she should not see the change in her ribbons till she is entirely dressed."

"How is that possible?" asked the girl, in a faltering voice. In spite of the stranger's assurance that the change of the shoulder-knots was only a jest and of no consequence, she did not believe him, and trembled at the thought that by fulfilling his orders her lady might be injured.

"How are you to manage that Fräulein S—— does not sooner discover the exchange?" said he, smiling. "In the most simple way possible. To protect the shoulder-knots, you will cover them with silver paper, which you will not take off till your lady is quite dressed. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said the distressed girl.

"Remember you are not to tell a living soul how the exchange of the ribbons was effected."

"But I shall be closely questioned."

"Say you received them with a message from your lady to sew them on to her dress, and that you never remembered to question her about it. It is my will that you should act thus, and don't suppose that these walls will shelter you if you fail in obeying my commands. But," said he, in a softer tone,

"I do not wish to intimidate you ; I will rather rely on your gratitude, and I am sure this feeling will induce you to comply with my wish." Saying this he took her hand, and, pressing it kindly, said, "The small service you will perform for me to-night shall be the last. When we met before, I told you it was improbable, but not impossible, that we should meet again. To-day, on the contrary, I can give you the strongest assurance that, if you comply with my request, we shall never meet again on this side of the grave." The terrified girl pressed her hand to her eyes, and when she looked up he was gone, and she saw by the alarmed look of Nanette at the door that he had left the room. Henriette sank, weeping bitterly, into a chair, and said, despairingly, to the sympathising Nanette:

"Oh ! I knew that this happy, peaceful life could not last. She will send me far from her, and I shall be lost and miserable."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FUCHSBAU.

IN the mean time the stranger had proceeded to the Fuchsbau, which he entered by a secret passage known to himself alone. He leisurely ascended the stairs, and found himself in his accustomed room. There was no one there, and the usual deep silence pervaded the house—at least this part of it. Two candles were lighted on a table, and there was a blazing wood fire in the chimney. The unknown threw off his hat and cloak, and then pulled a bell-rope, which communicated with the landlord's room in the tavern. Soon after the quick steps of a man were heard, the door was hastily opened, and Herr Scharffer came in, but remained standing respectfully at the door. He had run up quickly, and looked flushed, and was out of breath.

The other called out, "How does Matthias go on?"

The landlord shook his head, and answered, "Badly enough, I fear, sir. The man who gave the stroke must have been in earnest, for the knife went in deep, very deep; it passed through his side into the lungs, which the surgeon says are injured. I must not conceal the sad truth, that they think it scarcely possible he should recover."

The other started back at this speech, seized the handle of his dagger, and his face flushed crimson.

"He had lost a great deal of blood, too," continued Scharffer, "before they brought him here, and that has weakened him sadly, for he falls into one faint after another. Indeed, he is very seldom conscious; most part of the time he lies with his eyes shut, and breathing heavily."

"I must go and see him. He is well nursed, of course?"

"How can you doubt it, sir?" said Scharffer, rather reproachfully. "Rough as we are, we could never neglect Matthias, who is such a favourite with us. I assure you all within the walls of the Fuchsbau are in grief and consternation at his dangerous condition."

"Take me to him. I must see him myself."

"Certainly, sir. But I forgot to tell you that Joseph is waiting. He came here to look for you some days back, and arrived again only a few minutes ago; he looked pale and agitated, and insisted on seeing you instantly. I told him that there had been as yet no signal with the bell to show that you were in the house. Tell me, sir, have you entire confidence in Joseph?"

"The most entire. Show him in immediately, but remain near, for I may have a commission for you."

The landlord withdrew with a respectful bow, and Joseph entered. Herr Scharffer was right when he said that the chasseur looked pale and agitated. The young man remained standing in the middle of the room, and said, with a smile, "I did not expect, Joseph, to see you again here. You must have something important to tell me."

"I have, indeed," answered he; "I have sought you here for some days, in vain. Nor could I see Matthias either."

"Ah! yes—poor Matthias!"

"So then what I imagined is true, sir, when I heard of that house being broken into, and of

one of the men being wounded. Is Matthias dead?"

"No, but unfortunately badly wounded. But speak—what have you to communicate? I see by your face that it is some bad news."

"Very bad, sir."

"Go on, go on! I am prepared for the worst. Only no preface—straight to the point."

Joseph drew a deep breath, and said, "My master was recently conversing in his dressing-room with one of his friends. Both the gentlemen spoke of a mysterious person, who moves in their circle, and frequents the best society, who represents himself to be a man of fortune and rank, but who, in private, has all sorts of strange adventures."

If the other had not possessed wonderful powers of self-command, some emotion must have been perceptible in his face, but he showed no symptom whatever of consciousness, as he said, "And pray who is this singular person?"

"They named Baron von Brand."

"Ah! Baron von Brand! our good friend, through whose intervention you obtained your present situation."

"The same, sir."

“You have seen him at Count Fohrbach’s?”

“Yes, sir, repeatedly; but I went out of his way purposely, for I thought it might not be agreeable to him to meet me.”

“You acted wisely. We must let the baron know this.”

“I have done so already,” said the chasseur, with much emotion. “Yes, sir, forgive me. I could not resist warning you, for I should be miserable for life if any harm befel you.” Saying these words, the chasseur had fallen on his knees before the unknown, and seized his hand, while tears rolled over his pale cheeks.

“Rise, Joseph,” said the other, vainly trying to be stern. “What is Baron Brand to me? Let him reap as he has sown. But I thank you heartily for your kind wish to serve me, as one friend thanks another.” At these words his voice trembled, and as he raised the chasseur, the latter felt the kindly pressure of his hand.

“But, sir, I have still worse to relate. My master has just come from the palace. The president of police had an audience of his majesty before dinner to-day, at five o’clock.”

“A very unusual hour.”

"So it appeared to the count also, who consequently inquired the cause."

"Something of no consequence, probably."

"No, sir, of great consequence. You know a small house in the Schilder-Strasse, No. 36?"

The other started. "What of it?" said he, eagerly. His eyes flashed, and his hand grasped his dagger.

"In that house," said Joseph, "the police have to-day made a search."

"The police! and why? Who authorised them? What did they find?"

The chasseur continued: "I can only answer your last question, sir. They found in the house an old woman, a little boy, a young man, and a lady."

The young man visibly shrank at the beginning of this sentence, but when Joseph said "a lady," he could no longer retain his assumed composure, he became as pale as death, and seizing convulsively Joseph's hand, he said, in a hoarse whisper, "You said a lady—who was she?"

"The Baroness von Weiss, wife of the former adjutant-general."

At these words the other staggered back, overpowered by his anguish, and cried out, in a heart-

rending tone, "My poor sister—my own dear sister!"

These words took Joseph quite by surprise, and he felt deep sorrow when he saw the young man's distracted grief, and his powerful frame so prostrated; he thought of his energetic mind, his noble heart, and his deep feeling; what a bright career he might have had in life; and now he stood before him, perhaps already hemmed in and escape impossible, and soon to appear before the tribunal of inexorable justice.

The other had by degrees recovered his composure. He turned, with a sad smile, to Joseph, and this faithful creature felt deeper pain at this distressing attempt to smile than even at sight of his wild distress.

"It can't be helped, Joseph," said he; "every man has his weak points—has one spot where he is vulnerable. You have struck mine, and have wounded me deeply. But that is now over. What more have you to tell me?"

"Major von S—— came to see my master, and told him that Baroness von Weiss was detained in that house. Her husband, who has, it seems, long suspected her, had given his consent, and both

gentlemen blamed him extremely. The report of the president of police was not very graciously received either by his majesty, for he came into the ante-room grumbling about thankless service."

"That gives me some hope," said the other, in a low voice. "You can do me a service, Joseph. Try to get into the house in the Schilder-Strasse, find out what is going on there, and bring me any intelligence you can gain. Will you?"

"I would with pleasure, sir," answered Joseph, "but it would be in vain. I was already at the house, and tried to get in, but they examined me, and sent me off. Just as I left it I saw you, sir, and a man who was following and watching you."

"Watching me?"

"Closely. He prevented my speaking to you."

"Did he follow me to the Fuchsbau?"

"To the wall where you suddenly disappeared. He seemed very much surprised, for he examined the stones minutely, sought right and left for some door, and when he could find nothing he walked round the whole building. He was an officer of police, and had a sword."

"So! he was one of the police! That is very unpleasant. What do you think, Joseph?"

"If I may venture to speak plainly, I must say I think he followed you on purpose to know where you went, and I feel sure he returned straight to report what he had seen, and I should not be surprised if the Fuchsbau is at this moment entirely surrounded."

"You may be right, Joseph," answered the other, with composure; "and that would be a bad business for you, who must not be found here. Don't look at me so reproachfully—I know well both your courage and your fidelity; but here, believe me, you can be of no use to me, and may ruin yourself. So leave me. I order you to do so." He waved his hand, and as the chasseur seized it and grasped it with emotion, he returned the pressure, and said, "God be with you, Joseph."

As soon as the latter had quitted the room the landlord rushed in. He was in a state of excitement, which made him stumble into the room so suddenly, that the unknown called out, "Halloa! Scharffer, you rush in as if you were hunted."

"I soon shall be," answered he, in his gruff manner. "There is the devil to pay down stairs, sir."

"You are the very man for that."

"Six fellows have forced an entrance into the tavern, and when we refused to give them wine, they declared they would have it in spite of us; and one asked old Margaret what bell-pulls those were hanging near her chair."

"That was suspicious, certainly."

"Johann, too," continued Scharffer, "has just come in, and declares he saw faces he did not at all like in the street close to the Fuchsbau. But that is not the worst, for he brought the news that Strauber is taken up and is in gaol."

"Strauber!" said the other, frowning, and evidently disagreeably surprised, "that is a bad business indeed!"

"He had just taken a ticket at the railway," said Scharffer.

"Where to?"

"To St. —, across the borders."

"Then the villain has committed some crime which forces him to leave his country. It is possible you may have a search in this house."

"As we have often had before."

"But to-day it is worse."

"Why? we have nothing suspicious in the house."

"You forget Matthias," said the young man, in a grave voice.

"By all the saints! that is true," cried the landlord, turning pale. "If they find him, with the wound in his side, it's all up with us. It's a pity he is not dead, for then we have a capital hiding-place for him; but we can't put a living man into it."

"Don't speak of Matthias in that unfeeling manner," said the other, indignantly. "Before I leave the house I am determined to see him, so light me to his room."

"Don't think of such a thing," entreated the landlord. "Don't be angry with me for saying that very possibly they may be looking after yourself. Leave the house now while you can. Save yourself for our sakes. Hark! what's that?"

A distant crash was heard, which came from below. Both listened, and the young man said, "They are breaking down a door. They seem in earnest, indeed. Have they lights?"

"No, I saw to that instantly."

"Which of our people is in the house?"

"Johann, the Snapper, and two strangers, who arrived to-day, well recommended. When I saw

the other six enter, I told these to go to their rooms."

"Where are they?"

"In No. 4, over us."

"And Matthias?"

"In No. 2. Oh! I forgot, Franz is with Matthias, nursing him."

The young man stood there erect, his eyes flashing, his face full of energy and spirit. "The chief thing," said he, after a pause, "is to carry away Matthias. Fritz and Johann must manage that. Both are so strong that they can easily carry him. It may, indeed, cost him his life," said he, covering his eyes with his hand; "but what is to be done? Better for him to die than to fall into their hands. And Matthias has a frame of iron—he will perhaps be able to bear it."

"But where are we to take him to?" asked the landlord. "Believe me, sir, the police are now more cunning; I am sure they have beset the house on every side."

"Of course," answered the other, with a contemptuous smile; "but we won't allow ourselves to be outwitted, and if you attend exactly to my instructions, poor Matthias will get off safe."

“And you, sir?”

“Oh! I will disappear by the usual way. Bring Matthias to No. 1. There are some large maps there hanging against the wall. Take the centre one down, and make a hole through the thin partition, but only large enough to admit of Johann and Fritz passing through with their burden.”

“But in the adjoining house, sir, we have no connexion; the man who lives there is quite a saint, and would give the alarm in a moment.”

The other buttoned up his coat, seemingly indifferent to these words, took out his watch, and detached a seal from his chain. He then said, coolly, “At the noise of breaking through the wall the owner will instantly appear; Johann will give him this, and he will take charge of Matthias. Take care that the map is replaced on the wall.”

Master Scharffer received the seal with a look of veneration. He had always been afraid of his next-door neighbour, for he was a man who had the best reputation, and who had invariably expressed the greatest horror of the doings in the Fuchsbau, and those who frequented it had often declared he had been the cause of various visits from the police; and now there also *he* had established a connexion!

"Now away with you," cried the other, impatiently; "tell Johann and Fritz what they have to do, and then go to the chief staircase, and, like a good landlord, abuse roundly the vagabonds who are breaking your doors. Listen! they are at it again! Obey my orders strictly; I will wait for you here."

The fat landlord looked round before leaving the room; he saw that the young man had drawn in a chair to the table, and was sitting on it as composedly as if nothing had happened.

While going down stairs Scharffer crossed himself, and thought: "Perhaps it would be better to give one's self up to the police at once, for the man in that room can be neither more nor less than the devil himself."

The extreme coolness which the latter had shown was in a great degree assumed to encourage the landlord, for as soon as the latter disappeared he jumped up and hurried to the door to listen to what was going on in the house. Though the room was a long way from the tavern, he could hear that there were wild doings, sounds of furniture being dragged about, the tumbling about of boxes, and doors clapping to. "Strange," said the listener;

“they do their duty very singularly. Instead of dispersing all over the house to search, they are remaining in one particular spot, where they never yet found anything. I believe Blaffer’s affair is the entire cause of all this annoyance. If Matthias were only safe out of the way! Ah! I hear them now going up to fetch him.” He listened attentively, and heard the steps of men above, whose slow, heavy mode of walking showed that they were carrying a weighty burden. At the same time he could distinguish a suppressed noise of breaking through a wall as cautiously as possible, and then the crashing of the planks. “Heaven be praised!” said the young man, “he will soon be safe, if he only survives it. That hole in the wall costs me dear. I had kept this as a secret refuge for myself, but what would I not do for a friend, and Matthias was always one to me in this house. I ought to have gone with him, perhaps; who knows if this is only a common search, or whether they have not surrounded the house so that I shall find it difficult, if not impossible, to escape by the usual way. But it does no good always to anticipate the worst. Matthias is fairly off by this time.” For at this moment he heard the scolding voice of the land-

lord, who was standing on the steps which led to the lower story, and calling out loudly, "What kind of a row are you making in my tavern? Do you think you may do as you choose in my house? Marie, call the house porter." After he had said this, he returned into the room, where he found that the young man had extinguished the lights on the table, so that the room would have been in complete darkness had it not been for the gas-lamp in the passage, which threw a little light through the open door.

"Matthias is off; but for God's sake, sir, seek a way to escape without delay. As I looked down from that window into the street I saw some most suspicious-looking figures."

"On which side?"

"On that by which you usually leave the house."

"That is unlucky—I must go through the cellar, in that case."

"I believe it is the safest," said the landlord, anxiously, "only you must go down the front stairs and past the tavern."

"I know I must, but that won't signify. Margaret is sure to be at her post?"

"Certainly; she would let them tear her to pieces sooner than quit it."

“I will make her a signal, and then forwards! You go down stairs scolding furiously, and I will follow you.” Saying this he pulled a bell-rope which hung near the door, and a few seconds afterwards the gas-lamp in the passage was extinguished. But a loud scream proceeded from below, the voice of the old portress, and then Scharffer rushed down stairs, raging with all the force of his lungs.

The other followed him close; he placed his feet so lightly, that the footsteps of both sounded like one step; his eyes strove to penetrate the darkness in which the whole house was buried. He was close to the landlord, and they had reached the lowest step of the first flight, when Scharffer felt himself seized by strong arms. He did not fail, however, to warn his companion behind him by a loud cry. The latter remained for a minute motionless, then he seized the banisters and swung himself down with such force that he fell with his whole weight on the two men so unexpectedly, that they lost their balance and tumbled over each other. The fugitive now seemed to have no hesitation whither to direct his steps. A door he groped for he instantly found, passed through it into a vault, slid down some steps, and arrived in a spacious cellar, along which he hurried.

In this cellar there were several openings to the street, and one in particular had been enlarged by removing some stones, and a kind of ladder formed, which an active man could climb without much difficulty, but before swinging himself up he listened, holding his breath, and not till he ascertained that the narrow street was buried in profound silence did he cautiously leave the cellar.

Fortunately the adjacent houses, as well as a buttress on the wall where the opening was made, cast so deep a shadow on the place at which he came out, that no spy could have discovered him. He moreover took the precaution to stand for some time quite still, and then with some long strides he reached the other side of the street. Here he paused for a moment and looked back at the house he had just quitted, but the next moment he involuntarily seized the handle of his dagger, for his quick eye had discovered in two places of the dark wall which he had just left a movement as if two persons were slowly retreating from the wall. But as soon as he stood still, he saw nothing; and yet—it was no delusion—scarcely had he gone a step than the two dark spots moved again—two figures keeping step with him! “These are enemies and policemen,” thought

he ; “ what is to be done ? If they attack me, which I think they will scarcely venture to do so near this house, I must get rid of them by my dagger ; if they only persist in tracking me, I must, if possible, mislead them.”

This last was, however, no easy matter, for though the figures showed no disposition to shorten the distance between the other and themselves, still as little did they seem inclined to diminish it ; for if he took longer and quicker steps, they did the same ; if he stopped, so did they. The latter he did repeatedly, and deliberated whether it would not be better to turn and face his pursuers boldly. He was on the point of doing so, but he had in the mean time quitted the narrow street and entered one which was wide and long, and brightly lighted by some gas-lamps, and by their light he saw two equally suspicious figures, who, at a sign from his first pursuers, also followed him. “ Four,” thought he, “ would be too great a disparity ; so cunning and quickness, not strength, must decide here.” He threw a cautious glance round. The last of his pursuers were about twenty paces from him, the first were creeping along the opposite side of the street. He quickened his pace, and on reaching a narrow side-alley, he

darted into it with an active spring; but the more advanced of the policemen must have guessed his intention, for one rushed so quickly after him, that in the next second he heard his steps close by his side. The others did not remain behind, and their loud steps were distinctly heard on the pavement in the silence which reigned in the street.

The first thing to be thought of was to get rid of the man nearest him, and he could scarcely help smiling at an idea which occurred to him. He turned his course more towards the middle of the street, close to a gas-lamp, of which he suddenly seized the iron post, swung himself up on it, and fell right on the man, who was knocked down, and lay on the ground groaning. He then changed his course, and rushed along the dark streets to a part of the town where there was little traffic, and only an occasional gas-lamp burning, and where there were many stately mansions with gardens attached to them. His pursuers kept close to him, and though he was so strong and energetic, he felt that by degrees his breath began to fail, and that he required every effort to enable him to distance the men who were close on his heels. Whither could he turn? He had hoped to tire out the others; in vain—he was yet

a few paces in advance, but they were redoubling their efforts to reach him. Neither would give in, especially as the police did not fail to remark that the fugitive's strength began to give way. They thought, indeed, he seemed uncertain as to the way. He looked round, probably to ascertain exactly where he was. Did he not suddenly stand still? Yes, he had leaned against the wall, it was evident he could go no farther, and now intended to give himself up to them. With renewed strength the police-officers, seeing the end of their chase so near, again rushed forwards. They had now reached the spot where they still saw him. The first had stretched out his arm eagerly to seize him, when he saw that the fugitive had disappeared—vanished at a wall far too high to climb over, but in the vicinity of a garden pavilion, which, however, on closer examination, they found fast locked, and which, moreover, belonged to the garden of the president of police!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF THE POLICE.

WHILE the four police officials were standing quite exhausted and disheartened before the garden pavilion, the fugitive was safe within its walls. He remained standing close to the door, avoiding the slightest movement, and striving to subdue his panting breast that his quick breathing might not be heard on the outside. All around was as still as possible, and he was only separated from his pursuers by a thin wooden partition. He felt as the sailor does who is still on the stormy ocean. He had never before been so near destruction—indeed, he still was in imminent danger. The excitement of his nerves, the consciousness of the necessity for instant action, had not yet allowed him a moment to consider his position; but, more than all, that of his

unhappy sister. Now, when his body was weary, when the danger seemed for the moment past, but when he was still obliged to stand as if fettered to the spot, his thoughts chased each other in stormy, wild images through his brain. And, alas! the most terrific of all were no creations of fancy, but true—too true. His masterly mind repassed in thought all that had occurred. He reflected, compared, reasoned, and came to the dreadful result that the ground which he had hitherto trod so firmly had begun to give way under his feet, that he stood at the top of a slippery precipice, already sliding down, without his searching eye being able to discover a landing-place or a refuge. When he had come to this depressing conclusion, he felt for a moment tempted to end the matter at once—to throw open the door and to surrender himself to the police. But the next moment he lifted his head proudly, and said to himself: “Shame on me for this cowardly feeling, thus to throw away a game which, though almost lost, yet I will have spirit to carry on to the end. Then, life! good night!”

The only means of escape seemed to him to pass through the long garden which led to the house of the president of police. He heard the four men

outside discuss what was to be done, and at length agree to go to the police-office and ask for assistance to search the garden. So with infinite relief he listened to their departing steps.

It was clear he must lose no time in quitting the garden, but how could he pass through the house into the street? He must pass the guard-room, which was on the ground floor, and must undergo a strict examination there.

The sky was cloudless, a bright streak which was slowly spreading in the east indicated the rising of the moon. The air was cold, a sharp wind whistled through the withered branches of the trees, the ground was hard frozen. The fugitive now left his place of refuge, and reached the paved court at the back of the house. The coach-house was open, and the coachman was harnessing his horses by the light of a lantern, and talking to one of the soldiers who was on duty at the police-office. "Does an affair of this kind last long?" asked the soldier.

"Till two o'clock in the morning on this occasion, at least," answered the coachman. "I can tell you a masked ball at court is a matter which is no joke."

He who was at this moment crossing the court

with noiseless steps, had, in the midst of all the alarms and anxieties which he had endured, totally forgotten the expected gaieties. When the coachman spoke of a masked ball at court, he recollected that it was this evening, and a bold though dangerous project occurred to him which might yet save him from destruction. It was an idea which, from its very singularity, he instantly resolved to carry out. He drew out his watch, and after looking at it, he muttered, "Just eight o'clock—the right time exactly." He had now reached the house, and the broad staircase which led to the first story, where the president and his family resided. All was here well lighted, and he examined with a scrutinising eye the state of his dress. Thanks to the hard frozen ground there was not a speck to be seen on his high-polished riding-boots; his leathers were equally irreproachable. The blouse, of dark blue cloth, had been deranged by his running, but he tightened the leather girdle, tied his neckcloth carefully, and then, wishing to arrange his black hair and moustaches and his toilette, as he knew perfectly the locality of the house, he went along a narrow passage, and opened the door of a dressing-room.

Here there was a young girl, who, at sight of the strange figure which so suddenly presented itself at the door, uttered a cry, and tried to escape. "Stay where you are, Louise," said the figure, laughing. "My disguise must be good, for I see you don't know me in the least."

The word disguise seemed considerably to tranquillise the waiting-maid; still her voice trembled as she answered, "Yes, the disguise is so complete that I don't yet know who wears it; if you don't name yourself I will scream for help."

"Cœur de rose!" said the young man, laughing, "how ferocious you are this evening! Well, I will name myself, and at the same time refresh your memory." And pressing a couple of ducats into the hand of the astonished girl, he whispered, "Baron Brand wishes to surprise your fair mistress, and to see her for a moment."

The girl became as civil as possible. "Indeed you are a very dangerous gentleman," said she, laughing. "I could not really have believed that any one could represent another so completely. Fräulein Augusta is ready. I will tell her you are here." So saying, she disappeared, and the baron took the opportunity of arranging hair and toilette

before the glass, and when the girl returned he followed her into the salon. Augusta entered from the other side at the same moment; but when she saw the singular foreign-looking figure before her she stopped short. The baron, however, approached her with his usual graceful ease, and taking her hand, he kissed it tenderly, and said, in rather a reproachful tone, "Ah! you don't recognise me. Is my image so little present with you?"

"Inimitable, indeed, baron!" said Augusta, laughing. "I must tell you that you have created a formidable rival to yourself."

"This assurance would make me unhappy, did I not know that my rival will disappear after this evening."

"So you are jealous of yourself?"

"Yes, of myself, beloved Augusta—of the light which glances in your eyes, of the air you breathe, of the flower in your hair, of the bracelet which encircles your lovely arm."

"What a flow of words," said she, looking delighted. "Your costume is inimitable, your face and the colour of your hair quite altered, but your mode of speaking and your gestures I would have recognised anywhere."

At this moment the president's lady came into the room, and was thunderstruck at the sight of the strange-looking man in close conversation with her daughter; but Augusta said, smiling, "Baron Brand presents himself this evening to us in the disguise of a brigand chief."

"Cœur de rose!" said he, "I am betrayed, madam, and cannot retreat. You must allow me to escort you this evening. Nay, I have even a bolder wish, but I scarcely dare to utter it."

"Do not be afraid, baron," said the mother. "You are this evening such a dangerous man, that no wish of yours could be refused."

"Not even a place in your carriage?"

"Ah! baron, that is a trying request. What would the world say? How shall I account for such transgression of all rules? I must have a reason to give to others for accepting the escort of so formidable a brigand!"

"Certainly you must. But if the fair Augusta will only consent, pray introduce the formidable brigand as your future son-in-law."

"Oh! baron, you take me quite by surprise," said Augusta, casting down her eyes, which, however, sparkled with joy.

"I told you," said the mamma, "that no wish of yours could be refused."

"Ah! here comes the president," said the baron; "pray begin your presentations in my new character."

The president looked amazed at the strangely-dressed person who was conversing so familiarly with his ladies, and not less so when his wife presented him as her daughter's bridegroom. Luckily Augusta named him instantly, and a momentary smile crossed the president's withered features. He was, however, wise enough to treat the matter as a jest, but with the most sincere desire that it might one day become the truth, for he was delighted at the idea of such a rich and distinguished son-in-law. He looked at the baron attentively, and said, "You have a very singular costume—is there any particular idea connected with it?"

"None at all," said the baron, gaily; "only a fancy—a whim of mine."

"An elegant brigand," said the mamma, proudly.

"That was the kind of thing which certainly hovered before my eyes," answered the baron, laughing; "and I also intended a little compliment to my esteemed friend here, the president, for it is

reported in the city that you are in the midst of tales of robbery, and murder, and criminals, and that you have discovered traces which may lead to their detection."

The president answered, with a self-sufficient air, "It is true; but we must go cautiously to work, for we have to do with the very quintessence of knavery and cunning. I conduct the whole affair myself."

"The unfortunate devils!" said the baron, in a flattering tone.

"But it is time to go," said the president; "nearly nine o'clock. The carriage is at the door. Baron, where is yours?"

"Ah! Herr President," answered he, "I wished to mystify your ladies, so I did not come in my own carriage, of course."

"The baron has accepted a place in ours," said the mother, in a decided tone. On no account would she have lost sight of the elegant brigand, the baron, her future son-in-law.

He had no other mode of escape, and among many evils chose the least. His four pursuers were undoubtedly at this moment in the house, or near it, and they had, probably, secured every street in

this part of the town, thus the only possibility of salvation was leaving the house under the mighty protection of the president of police himself, and accompanying him to the other end of the town to the palace. Once there, he could easily disappear in the crowd, find the carriage of a friend to take him home, and there change his dress.

The servant announced that the carriage was waiting, the ladies put on their mantles, and the baron exclaimed, with well-acted regret, "Now begins the punishment of my thoughtlessness. I forgot to bring a paletot; so, dear madam, I fear I must leave you and first go home to get one."

"Not at all, dear baron," answered she; "I can lend you a cloak of my husband's."

"Yes, baron, if you don't object to an official cloak," said the president, smiling. "We old gentlemen have not such a variety as you young fashionables."

The baron at first declared that he could not take such a liberty as to wear the president's own official cloak, but at last he allowed himself to be persuaded, and the servant put it over his shoulders. It was an old cloak of brown cloth with a light blue collar—quite regulation.

Thus they descended the stairs and passed the guard-room, at the door of which several of the police were standing. When the carriage was fairly on its way to the palace the baron drew a deep breath of relief.

CHAPTER XV.

A MASKED BALL AT COURT.

ON an evening like the present the palace was a blaze of lights within and without. The gas candelabras formed a wreath of pure bright flame, which illuminated the whole mass of building, and there were planted in the adjoining streets, at intervals, vessels filled with lighted pitch, their dark-red glow forming a wild and striking contrast to the white glare of the gas. These rival flames lighted up brilliantly the spacious square, where an innumerable quantity of *ignis-fatuus* lights seemed to be dancing about. These were the lanterns of the numerous carriages arriving in all directions, crossing each other, some going straight forward, others describing a circle. An immense crowd was assembled at the principal entrance to the palace, for the

purpose of seeing as much of the arriving masks as the envious coverings of shawls, cloaks, and paletots would admit of. These spectators pressed eagerly forward, and often pushed so near that the soldiers on guard, though mounted cuirassiers, could scarcely keep the entrance free; for though all retreated when the stamping horses approached, still those behind kept shoving forward, so that there was a constant living ebb and flow.

This did not, however, prevent the carriages coming up, though slowly, and depositing their contents. The string seemed endless, and those who left home rather late were obliged to station themselves behind the very last carriage, unless they had the *entrée*. Our president enjoyed this privilege, and, escorted by a cuirassier, he drove up straight to the palace. The ladies and gentlemen got out, and when they entered the hall where the cloak-rooms were, they heard the sounds of a Polonaise.

“Quick! quick!” called out the president, “the Polonaise has begun; we must not delay a moment if we wish to enjoy the *coup d’œil*.”

The baron, who had hoped to be able to disappear in the crowd before entering the ball-room,

found himself obliged to offer his arm to the fair Augusta, while the mother was led away by an ancient excellency to join in the stately Polonaise. The president was quickly engulfed in the whirlpool of masks. A common masked ball and one at court are pretty much alike—only in the palace the rooms are handsomer, the lighting more brilliant, and the guests more numerous; but there is the same stifling heat, the same choking dust, and the same mixture of perfumes, of flowers, and essences. Here, as elsewhere, are some rich and elegant costumes, chosen with taste, and others badly arranged, and making no effect. The conversation, too, is not at all superior to that in less classic ground. Witty remarks are rarely heard, but the silliest phrases abound on every side. “Mask! I know you,” seems to be the prevailing phrase; only here it is said in French, not German, to suit a court atmosphere.

Common balls have one advantage, which is, that the society are equally distributed through the suite of rooms, while here the apartments in which the royal family are seated are actually besieged by a crowd of loyal subjects, so close that they are like a swarm of bees. Each one stretches out his neck

as far as possible, assuming the sweetest smile, in the hope of catching a glimpse of royalty, and, perhaps, a gracious passing glance.

The Polonaise proceeded in an almost interminable procession through all the apartments, and at last moved slowly through the small throne-room, where the members of the royal family were, and who in this way passed all the masks in review. The music played in slow time, so that each particular mask could be examined by the court, and an occasional gracious word condescendingly addressed to some fortunate individual.

In vain had Baron Brand attempted to persuade the young lady whom he was escorting to retire with him into one of the less crowded rooms, to exchange, as he said, the tiresome Polonaise for some interesting conversation, for he felt it was very unpleasant, nay, very dangerous, to pass through the throne-room; but Augusta would on no account retire from her place. She was delighted by the whispers she heard on every side, and by all the conjectures excited by her strange yet striking cavalier. The baron was forced to proceed, and as he saw it was inevitable, he raised himself to his full height, and his lofty step and

air seemed designed to attract universal attention.

The whole court was assembled. Her majesty was attired in the tasteful costume of a noble lady of the middle ages, surrounded by her ladies, four of whom were more especially conspicuous, as they stood nearest to her majesty. One of these was Eugenie von S——; and as soon as the baron entered the room he could not resist looking at this charming girl. There she stood, her tall, elegant figure placed nearest to her majesty's throne. She wore a close-fitting dark blue dress, which formed a beautiful contrast to her white skin and clear complexion; but the baron felt remorse when he saw her shoulder-knots of blue, green, and silver, for the fair girl's face was as pale as alabaster, and her eyes red, as if from weeping; indeed, by the convulsive pressure of her lips, it was evident she required all her self-command to suppress her tears.

But where was the duke? Standing close behind her, and the same colours which Eugenie wore were on his dress. Sometimes he bent down in a marked manner, and whispered a few words to her, which she was obliged to answer with civility; but the wan smile which at such moments crossed her face

was so icy and repulsive that the baron was shocked by it. He cursed the service which the duke had demanded from him, and would, probably, have reproached himself still more severely had not his thoughts on this evening been absorbed by so many dangers. Why had he fulfilled the duke's wish? To entitle him to demand a service in return, and to form an intimacy with him which might be hereafter of vital importance to him. But this *hereafter*? Alas! it might never come, for the baron felt a fatal presentiment that the sands of life were for him nearly run out; and yet, if possible, the duke should give some compensation for the service he had done him. With these thoughts he passed through the rooms proudly, his head in the air, and returning boldly the astonished looks directed towards him. There must have been something very striking or peculiar in his appearance, for wherever he passed people whispered to each other, and even Eugenie raised her large, dark, melancholy eyes, and fixed them on him. The baron shrunk from the glance of Count Fohrbach, whom he liked and esteemed, and who had shown him much attention and kindness. The exchange of the shoulder-knots filled his heart with shame and

regret, and he would have been truly thankful if he could have undone the mischief he had caused—alas! like too many other actions. The young count, in a splendid dress of violet velvet and silver, was standing near, and when he saw the baron his heart was filled with indignation. The baron could not comprehend the look of fury in the count's face, for he had no idea that the young man knew he was concerned in the persecution of the duke towards Eugenie.

The Polonaise soon came to an end, the baron restored his partner to her mother, intending now to withdraw as quickly as possible; but the president's lady was determined not to let him off so easily, and insisted on presenting him with a significant air to various friends. The baron, however, felt he had had enough of the dangerous comedy he had risked, and looked round to see how he could most easily withdraw without exciting attention, when the old lady said to him:

“Only see, my dear baron, how agitated I am. Have you heard of the unfortunate story of Baroness von Weiss? Various people have mentioned it to me this evening, thinking that, as the president's wife, I must know all particulars; but I

never heard a word of it till now. My husband never speaks of such matters at home. Did you know of it?"

The baron answered, "I, too, have only just heard it. A sad affair, certainly. No more is ascertained about it."

A chamberlain now approached hastily, and said: "His highness the duke is looking for his excellency the president of police. Here is the duke himself."

At these words he drew back with a profound bow, to make way for the duke, who bowed to the mother and daughter, and cast a sidelong glance at the stranger brigand standing beside them; but the baron smiled and said,

"Gracious sir, I take the liberty to wish your highness good evening."

"Ah! I should know that voice," answered the duke, looking keenly at him. "Is it really you, Baron Brand?"

"Myself in person. *Cœur de rose*! I may well be proud of my disguise."

"I compliment you on it," answered the duke. "I have been looking for you for some time, and also for the president of police. I somehow always

associate you together. Madam," said he, turning to the president's lady, "I advise you not to grant this dangerous youth free access to your house."

The mother smiled, and said, "There are connexions and ties, your highness, under shelter of which much may be permitted."

"Ah! there are connexions," cried the duke, laughing. "So, baron, you are caught at last! Oh, you traitor and hypocrite! Mademoiselle Augusta, may I venture to offer you my congratulations?"

The young lady curtsied and cast down her eyes, mamma tossed her head with an air of dignity, and the baron was on thorns.

Fortunately the duke remembered the cause of his coming, and said to the mamma, "Have you any idea where I can find your husband? I must see him immediately."

The chamberlain stepped forward, and mentioned that the president, he believed, was playing whist in the yellow salon.

Luckily her mamma whispered something to Augusta at this moment, which enabled the baron to say hastily to the duke, "Take me with you."

The duke, turning to the ladies, said, "You will excuse my depriving you for a few minutes of the

baron's society. Come, baron, I have something to say to you."

They went together, and as every one made way respectfully for the duke, they soon got through the crowd. The latter had taken the arm of the baron, and when they reached a gallery where there were very few persons, he said, "Baron, I am deeply indebted to you. You arranged about the shoulder-knots famously. I have not the most remote idea how you contrived it. I doubted the possibility of the exchange; and when I saw it, I was almost as much surprised as Count Fohrbach. You should have seen his face! Did you chance to observe him?"

"No," answered the other, coolly, "but I remarked that Mademoiselle Eugenie looked very pale and sorrowful."

"Just what I wish," answered the duke, eagerly; "believe me, this circumstance will bear good fruit for me."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh! it is plain enough. The whole court immediately recognised my colours. I saw a great many significant smiles. She is fairly compromised."

"That would distress me exceedingly."

"Pooh! pooh! all stratagems are allowable in love and war," said the duke, and added, with a sigh, "I am madly in love with the girl, and it is no mere form of words when I again assure you that my whole influence is at your service at any time."

"And I probably may soon have recourse to it," answered the baron. "You are looking for the president of police?"

"Am I to be your advocate in that quarter?" asked his highness, laughing. "*A propos*, is the announcement madame just made me really true?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders, and said, "One cannot be too careful in admitting such an event; but may I be permitted to ask your highness what your object is with the president of police?"

"Have you not heard of this late scandalous affair?"

"Of which?" asked the baron, as carelessly as possible.

"That of the Baroness Weiss. The whole court, as well as the whole society, are indignant about it."

I am looking for the president in the name of his majesty."

"I am utterly astonished! I know nothing."

"You are aware, of course, that the old general had constant disputes with his wife. The rabid old wolf! with such a lovely, charming creature as the baroness! I don't know what doubtful event occurred in her early youth, for between ourselves that point does not seem quite clear; but at all events, there is a small house in the Schilder-Strasse which she has frequently visited *incognita*. It appears that the police, for some reason unknown to me, have had their eye on this house. Imagine, baron, it is surrounded and searched, with the command to arrest all who are found there; among others, this unhappy lady, who was by chance in a room on the first *étage*."

"She was arrested?" cried the other, startled.

"At all events, she is forbidden to leave the house till further orders. The old general must have had his mind poisoned, for he is furious, and intends to bring the case before his majesty direct."

"That is, indeed, a terrible history; but what is the president to do now?"

"He is simply to give permission to the unfortunate lady to leave the house."

"And to whom does the house belong?"

"No one seems to know. I hear it is very elegantly furnished. There is some strange mystery, certainly. You, who can unravel all things, should try what you can do here."

"If I were commissioned to do so," answered the baron, composedly.

"Oh, that commission you shall have with pleasure," said the duke.

"But from whom, your highness?"

"I can answer for your having it from his majesty himself."

"With all deep respect for his majesty," said the baron, "I must also have an order from the president to be admitted to the prisoner."

"That he surely cannot refuse to his future son-in-law."


"Jesting apart, gracious sir, I can do nothing in the matter myself; but if you, as representative of his majesty, demand it from the president, you will find no difficulty in obtaining from him an order for me to visit the house in the Schilder-Strasse."

"And may I name you?"

"Make any use of my name your highness pleases."

This conversation had taken place while both gentlemen were passing through the long gallery; they had frequently paused, and now had arrived at the end of the corridor. Just as they were passing into the passage they met Count Fohrbach and Major von S——, who were hastily entering. At sight of the duke and the baron the count stepped aside with a perplexed look, as if uncertain whether to approach or to turn away. It was evident the count was looking for Baron Brand, but seeing him with the duke, he thought it contrary to etiquette to address him. The latter smiled in a peculiar manner—a smile which called forth a very heightened colour in the aide-de-camp's face, which, however, the baron, who had dropped the duke's arm, did not appear to observe, and, as if struck by some sudden thought, he went up to Major von S——, who, however, drew back.

This meeting was unpleasant to all the four gentlemen; but the duke terminated it by a slight bow, saying to the baron, "Wait for me here, baron. I hope to bring you the paper you wish for in a short time."



The count's eyes followed the duke till he was out of sight, and he then turned to the baron, who, foreseeing what was to occur, remained standing quietly on the same spot.

"We have been looking for you, Baron Brand," said the aide-de-camp, after a pause, in a tone which plainly indicated that the speaker was striving as far as possible to retain his composure.

"Both gentlemen looking for me!" answered the baron, in the most polite manner; "singularly enough, I also have been looking for you—not only for Count Fohrbach, but for both gentlemen."

The posture which the baron had assumed in saying these words, as well as the manner in which he pronounced them, were so entirely different from his usual effeminate, affected mode of speech, that it produced a startling impression on the others.

"This is not the place for explanations," said Major von S—. "We must beg you to accompany us into one of the adjoining empty rooms."

"For what I have to say, also," said the baron, assentingly, "these rooms are not suitable, and I would follow you with pleasure immediately, but you heard his highness's command, which fetters me to this spot."

“And the commands of his highness, Baron Brand is sure to obey.”

But the baron did not affect to understand this remark, for he continued, coolly, “If, however, you wish to see me at a later hour, I shall place myself at your disposal, gentlemen, with pleasure.”

“We won’t detain you many minutes,” said the count. “Who knows what his highness’s commands may be when he returns? Here is a small boudoir, quite free from all possibility of listeners.”

Baron Brand bowed, and went into the boudoir, and the others followed.


This boudoir formed a corner of the palace, and had no rooms on either side, so it was free from all listeners. The walls were hung with crimson silk, and the room only lighted by two wax tapers, so it was rather dark. In the grate of polished steel some logs of wood were burning. Count Fohrbach and Major von S—— threw themselves into two arm-chairs; the baron preferred standing, and leaned with his back against the chimney-piece, so that neither the light of the fire nor of the wax candles fell on his face. All around was so still, that nothing but the very distant and deadened tones of the music recalled the fact of being in the near

vicinity of a gay ball. It was some minutes before any of the three spoke. However anxious the count had been to find the baron, whom he with justice suspected as having participated in the exchange of the ribbons, for he well remembered the report he had heard in the blue gallery—he sank now into thought, from which Major von S—— did not disturb him, being there simply as a witness. The baron had crossed his arms, and was gazing gloomily at the dark crimson walls, which at one moment appeared almost black, and then, when the flame of the wood flickered up, brightened into the colour of blood. He had his own sad thoughts—wild, dreadful thoughts; he struggled with his emotion, but he saw clearly before him the approaching end of his strange eventful life. He started from his gloomy abstraction, and addressing his companions, said, “You had a communication to make to me. Permit me first to speak, and when I have finished, perhaps you will find that though I don’t know what questions you wish to ask me, I shall have answered them all.”

CHAPTER XVI.

COURT FROWNS AND SMILES.

THE chief of the police had in the mean time presented himself in the room where their gracious majesties were playing whist, in the expectation of receiving as usual some gracious notice. The president never left the royal circle without some mark of favour. On this occasion he entered by a door which brought him *vis-à-vis* to his majesty, who, fixing his eyes on him steadily and frowning, took no notice of his deep obeisance, but turned his head away. The queen, too, seemed absorbed in some observations on the colour of the hangings, which she was addressing to the duchess. It was evident that he was out of favour, and the unfortunate president, who knew court well, soon found his fear confirmed by the cold bows he re-



ceived from those who usually overwhelmed him with their attentions. When he approached a whist-table, the party was already made up. The master of the horse even entreated Herr von Dankwart, whom he generally carefully avoided, to make a fourth at whist when he saw the president approaching, thinking that of two evils it was best to choose the least. Malice, vanity, and arrogance are small crimes when weighed in the balance with being in disgrace at court.

The president wandered past several whist-tables, joining occasionally in the conversation, but the answers he received were stiff and formal; indeed, more than one even looked round to see if any one observed that the president was standing beside him. Suddenly the duke entered the yellow salon, and going up to the president, said, "My dear sir, I have been looking for you everywhere."

At these words our president felt as if a star had arisen in a dark night.

The manner of the duke was as friendly and cordial as usual, and he spoke in such an audible voice, that all in the room turned their heads.

"Can you spare me a few moments?" continued his highness; "if so, I wish you would take a turn with me through the rooms."

Highly flattered, the president bowed his acquiescence, and they went into the adjoining room.

"My good president," said the duke, reproachfully, as soon as they were alone, "what on earth have you been about?"

"That I am supposed to have committed some indiscretion I have already remarked," answered the chief of police, in an aggrieved tone; "but I do assure your highness that I know the cause as little as the babe unborn."

"Why? what the deuce! You either have a very bad memory, or you are really as inexperienced as a child. Do you think it is a matter of indifference to their majesties and the duchess that you should suddenly arrest a lady of distinction, who has been on terms of intimacy with the most distinguished of the society?"

"Ah!" said the president, for a colossal light suddenly blazed up in his mind. "But," said he, "I can assure your highness that I had previously an interview with the husband of this lady."

"In what a snare you have allowed yourself to be entangled," said the duke, impatiently. "Do you know the old fox so little? He has caused this *exposé* on purpose to enable him to divorce his wife

with impunity. He authorised you to proceed, and a quarter of an hour afterwards he accused you to his majesty of being harsh and inexorable."

"How disgraceful in him! And to his majesty!"

"To his majesty himself, who said he must confess that he had seldom known an instance of such ruthless cruelty."

"I am a ruined, lost man," sighed the president.

"But what could you be thinking of? We heard you had discovered traces of a band of house-breakers, but how you could connect this poor lady with such an affair I cannot imagine. My dear president, it was very unlike yourself."

"Heaven forbid that I should accuse the baroness! but the house is suspicious, and as she was found there, it was almost a necessity to prevent her leaving it."

"I had no idea that you were so ferocious, president."

"I may also assure your highness that the old general not only highly approved of the baroness's detention, but made her out to be a very suspicious character."

"An ill-tempered, malicious old wretch! But we must endeavour to repair the wrong. You

know that your office is never interfered with in the highest quarters in the shape of a command, but it is expected that you will make some efforts to fulfil the wish of which I am the bearer."

The president hesitated.

"I would not for the world mention that your excellency had not at once consented," said the duke, gravely. "Pray do quickly what you are to do, for I must hasten back to say that all is happily arranged."

"Is it desired that I should remove the arrest on all the inhabitants of that house?"

"The baroness, at all events, must be instantly liberated. You can do as you please with the others."

The president shook his head, and said, "It cannot be managed in that way—all are equal before the law. I must either detain all or liberate all, and in the latter case it would be to confess that the police have been in error. That would be dreadful!"

"For once, then, do what is so dreadful. It will be better, too, for the unfortunate lady that her detention should be attributed to an error."

The president had a considerable struggle with

his feelings, but he at last said, "Let it be so, then; but I must find my secretary, to send him off instantly to the Schilder-Strasse."

"That is not necessary," said the duke, joyfully. "Give me a couple of lines! Baron Brand has offered to convey them, and to arrange the affair to-night. Come, here is pen and ink."

With a suppressed sigh the president wrote a couple of lines, signed the paper, and held it out to the duke, saying, "Before Baron Brand, whose intervention I gladly accept, undertakes the affair, I must give him a few instructions."

"No counter-orders, president," said the duke, laughing.

"Certainly not, duke; here is the paper. But one good turn deserves another: come with me through the salons, the yellow one in particular, in friendly conversation."

"Let us go, arm-in-arm, without delay," said the duke, laughing.

And thus they passed the astonished whist-players, and then proceeded to the small salon, where the duchess, first nodding to her son, said she was charmed to see at last the president of police. Her majesty dropped a card, which the president was so

fortunate as to pick up, a service her majesty acknowledged with a gracious smile; and when the happy president again passed through the rooms, every one pressed him to join their whist-table with overflowing attention and courtesy.

Baron Brand had, during this time, related to his two hearers a terrible history—the history of his life. He had neither concealed nor embellished; he had sketched himself faithfully, with all his good and noble qualities, with all his failings and vices. “Now you know all,” concluded the baron. Count Fohrbach rose, approached the narrator, and, in deep emotion, seized his hand and pressed it cordially.

“It is a great relief to my feelings,” continued the baron, “to have been permitted the privilege of relating my sad story to two men of honour, who, as they now see clearly all the circumstances, may perhaps judge me more mercifully. I have only one more request to make—that you will consider my position in all its bearings, and give me your opinion.”

“Frightful, indeed,” said Major von S——.

“That I cannot remain here is certain; indeed, nothing would induce me to stay but the fate of

my poor unhappy sister. I trust, however, she will soon be in safe hands. My other connexions are almost all dissolved. I have already provided for those who are dependent on me. If any one else occurs to me, I am prepared to do the same; and then—I am ready.”

“Oh! surely it is not your intention to——” cried the count, in a tone of horror.

“To forestal the decree of nature?” answered the baron, with a smile. “Certainly not; that would cast a shadow on my name, and cause pain to those friends whom I left behind me. No! do not think that. I will only guide the threads of my own destiny; and if I am forced to quit the world, it will be according to all the rules of propriety and honour.”

“Baron, you speak in mysteries.”

“Which, however, will soon be solved, I promise you; but do not mourn for me already. Only imagine some one has been reading to you an interesting chapter of a romance—think no more of it—close the book for the present; you shall soon hear the conclusion, and I trust you will not be dissatisfied with it. But, *cœur de rose*!” continued he, after looking at his watch, in his accustomed

light and jesting tone, "we have talked here for nearly an hour, and I believe it is our duty now to devote ourselves to the ball."

He turned to leave the room, but the count, detaining him, said, "Only one thing more! Would it be indiscreet in me to ask if you had anything to do with the exchange of the shoulder-knots? Oh! if so, do not conceal it from me; the happiness of my whole life hangs on your answer."

"Don't be uneasy," said the baron, with a smile. "One hour before the ball the ribbons were white, and I would bet ten to one that they are white again before the end."

"I will go this moment to look," cried the young man, in delight. And, pressing the baron's hand, he hurried away.

At this moment the duke came from the opposite side of the gallery, and on seeing the baron he held up the paper from a distance. When he came nearer, he said, "It cost some trouble, but it is in all respects what you wished; you can make use of it this very night. But what is to become of the poor lady? She will not choose to return to her husband?"

"Does your highness remember that I succeeded

in doing you a trifling service, and that you promised to return it one day?"

"Perfectly, and I don't retract that promise."

"Then you have now a good opportunity to fulfil it. Use all your influence to procure an honourable and safe place of refuge for Baroness Weiss with your mother the duchess, or with her majesty."

"That would be no easy matter, my dear baron."

"But it can be accomplished, nevertheless," said the other, in a decided tone. "You see, I repeat your former reply to me, and when you said so, I used every exertion, and I succeeded."

"Yes, I don't deny that," answered the duke, laughing, "and I promise you to do the same, at whatever risk."

"Your royal word on it, your highness?"

"Yes, my word of honour. I will immediately set to work. Now is the very moment when the reaction in the poor lady's favour will make her many friends." So saying, he hastened back into the ball-room.

Dancing there continued gaily, and in the yellow salon whist was played devotedly. Herr von Dankwart, who had been so fortunate this evening as to

be invited to play with the master of the horse and the director of the theatre, was delighted with his happy position, which he would not have given up for the world; but he was playing very carelessly, which had caused him to receive several reproofs. "That is rather too much," said his partner, angrily; "you have actually trumped my king of clubs!"

"Indeed, I must say," said the grand chamberlain, "that Herr von Dankwart is very confused this evening. What are you thinking of?"

"Herr von Dankwart is probably thinking of the charming sketches which a celebrated artist lately made of him," said a sonorous voice, suddenly, behind his chair.

He looked round furiously, and saw a man standing in a simple but striking costume, and though he wore no mask, he could not recognise the face.

The stranger smiled when he had spoken these words, and rested his hand on the hilt of a Circassian dagger which was stuck in his girdle.

The grand chamberlain coughed, and looked embarrassed, and his excellency the master of the horse bit his lips, with a half-suppressed smile.

"A masquerade jest," said Herr von Dankwart, with a forced smile.

"Not at all," continued the stranger; "there are, indeed, six portraits, every one of which is most wonderfully like the original."

"So you have seen them?" asked Von Dankwart, sulkily.

"Any one may see them who chooses to visit the possessor of them."

"And pray who is the owner?" cried Herr von Dankwart, still more enraged.

"I have no reason for concealing the name," answered the other, with composure. "Baron von Brand makes no mystery about possessing these six invaluable portraits."

"But what are these sketches, or portraits?" asked the grand chamberlain, maliciously.

"A scandal, a disgrace!" cried the little man, now in a violent passion, "which will not be tolerated in high quarters. You must know, gentlemen, a poor painter, a dauber, to whom I gave some advice about his wretched paintings, has taken the mean revenge of caricaturing me in the most shameful manner. I only share the fate of many of the most distinguished men in every age, and I am not illiberal enough to resent what this poor devil does. But I hear Baron Brand has thought fit lately to

show these odious sketches, first to one person and then to another, in the most malicious way, and I shall certainly call him to account."

"Baron Brand is both anxious and ready to answer for his conduct," said the stranger, coolly.

Herr von Dankwart examined again the figure by his side, and said, after a slight pause, "And pray, who may you be, who thus intrude yourself on us?"

"I do not intrude myself more than others sometimes do," answered the stranger; "besides, I am one of your admirers, Herr von Dankwart. I consider you with wonder, for you have accomplished great things."

Herr von Dankwart answered this dubious compliment with a contemptuous sneer.

"Yes, you have done much. You have contrived, during the short time you have resided here, by your impertinent conduct, your unfounded pride, your extraordinary rudeness, and odious vanity, to make yourself hated by high and low; and that was no easy matter, considering the universal esteem and respect your illustrious mistress inspires, whose high reputation was in some degree reflected on your undeserving self."

Though these words were spoken in a very marked manner, yet the stranger had lowered his voice so much, that he could only be heard by those at the table. Herr von Dankwart sprang up from his chair, pale with rage, and said, in a trembling voice, "Your name, sir! I demand your name! You may thank this place that I do not take other measures; but if your insolence is not accompanied by cowardice, you will instantly tell me your name."

"Cœur de rose!" said the stranger, laughing, and changing his tone entirely, "you and I have both repeated my name several times since we began this agreeable conversation; but the Baron von Brand is happy to name himself at your request before these gentlemen."

Their excellencies looked in amazement; and though they now recognised the baron's voice and mode of speaking, and therefore knew it must be he, still they could not trace one accustomed feature in the face before them.

"A capital disguise!" cried the master of the horse.

Herr von Dankwart drew a long breath, and said, "Ah! so it is Herr Baron von Brand!—very good—I know what to do." So saying, he seated

himself again at the table, but the cards visibly trembled in his hands.

The baron withdrew, smiling ; but when he had left the room, his features became grave and stern, and he muttered, "It is done ! and a more severe punishment no one could voluntarily undergo."

Count Fohrbach had hurried to the ball-room to look at the shoulder-knots, and, oh joy ! as the baron had predicted, white ribbons were now fluttering from the fair Eugenie's shoulders. She had made use of the first free moment to throw away the duke's hated colours. How tenderly the count now gazed at her, and how quickly the paleness in her cheeks kindled into mantling blushes ; and as he, like a well-trained aide-de-camp, understood the art of manœuvring, he succeeded in drawing aside the lovely maid of honour from her companions. Eugenie whispered to him with downcast eyes, "My ribbons have every right to be white, for I hope our life lies bright and clear before us. I had a conversation with the duchess before the ball, and she does not object to our union."

"So you are mine, beloved Eugenie, at last !" cried the aide-de-camp, now overflowing with hap-

piness, snatching her hand, and kissing it in the half-dark passage ; indeed, it was only the approach of a portly valet, followed by several servants with refreshments, which prevented the delighted count from pressing Eugenie to his heart.

Before the baron left the room he again joined the president's lady and her daughter, and allowed them to present him to several of their friends ; and it seemed evident to every one that the Baron von Brand was to be considered the undoubted bridegroom of the charming Augusta.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BRIDE AND THE WUNDEL FAMILY.

THE letter which Herr Blaffer had written to Herr Staiger, giving him notice that he no longer intended to employ him, had been safely delivered. The old man shook his head mournfully after reading it, sighed deeply, and reflected whether he should show it to Clara. He felt that so sad a change in their circumstances could not long be concealed from her; for, alas! he knew no other source from which he could replace the sum he received for translating. He sighed again when he thought of all the fair dreams in which he had indulged so recently.

Clara read the bookseller's letter without showing much emotion, but her hand trembled when she

gave it back to her father. "What do you think?" said she. "Is Arthur the cause of this?"

Herr Staiger answered: "Oh no! my good child. Who knows the real reason? Herr Blaffer never liked me; and it is my belief that if Herr Arthur had not protected us I should have been dismissed long ago."

Privations soon began to be felt in the family. The cost of Catherine's orphan child, too, was an addition to the usual expenses; but Staiger would accept nothing for her support, though Dr. Erichsen, who occasionally visited them, urged him to do so.

The old man replied: "When she came to us, we arranged nothing of the kind. I took the child gladly, because she was alone and friendless in the world, and the little she costs is not worth mentioning; besides, it is a real pleasure to feel you are doing good."

Since the eventful day when Arthur and Clara had met at Madame Becker's, he had never come to the house; but Clara frequently saw him hovering near her, either when she was in the theatre, on the stage, or getting into the carriage. She knew that the slightest sign or glance on her part would suffice

to bring him to her side ; but she carefully avoided this. She tried to persuade herself that she was too proud, and her feelings too deeply hurt by his unfounded accusations, to wish for a reconciliation ; but yet, when she was in solitude, this wish would arise in her heart, and tears of bitter anguish flow from her eyes.

The children felt there was much less comfort than formerly, and Staiger could only pacify Master Karl's complaints at the everlasting potatoes and milk-soup by relating wonderful stories to him, which he had now plenty of time to do ; for though, through the recommendation of an old friend, he was not totally devoid of employment, he had still a great deal of leisure left.

As the season of the year was now considerably advanced, Herr Staiger had brought his table near the window, so that he could write till late in the evening without lighting a candle. Clara was sitting opposite him, busy in finishing some embroidery which she had begun in happier days. Mario had taken the little stranger child beside her on a stool, and was showing her some pictures in a large torn book—an amusement which no longer attracted the boy. “ They are all stuff,” said he,

"and it's no use my looking at them any more, for I know them every one by heart; it's not all true either in that book; there are no giants who eat little boys! I never saw a live one!"

"Ah! but giants don't show themselves unless little boys are very naughty indeed," said Staiger, smiling; "and I hope, Karl, you're not so bad as all that."

"Oh! he's bad enough," said his little sister, "for he tore off my doll's left leg yesterday, and has cut off her head besides."

"That is very naughty, Karl," said Clara. "You have broken all your own playthings, and now you destroy your sister's too."

"The doll had grown so ugly," said Karl. "I quite hated her, the nasty thing, staring at me always with her goggle eyes. But I've not smashed all my own toys; I have got the best one still." At these words he plunged his hand into his pocket, and brought forth a Jew's-harp, which he put to his lips, and drew forth the most horrible sounds.

Clara turned from the boy on hearing some one approaching. There was a knock at the door, which the little girl ran to open, and there entered

two persons—a lady and a gentleman. The former went up to Clara, laughing, and before she could rise to receive her, shook her hand kindly. It was Mademoiselle Therese, as gay and brilliant as ever, who took the chair Herr Staiger offered her without troubling herself at all about her companion, who, with his hat in his hand, remained standing shyly at the door. He was about forty, thin, and with a grave, long face. His hair was combed back smooth from his forehead, and, as his head was bent forward, he had an appearance of humility, which corresponded with the habitual stoop of his figure, and his shy, embarrassed air. He remained at the door, staring into his hat intently. He wore a long, brown great coat, buttoned tight up to the chin and hanging down to his heels, and a stiff, white neckcloth, which did not particularly become his sallow complexion.

Therese, after making inquiries as to the health of all the family, said she had so much to do that she really did not know which way to turn.

During this time her escort remained waiting patiently at the door. Clara rose, and begged the gentleman to come forward, on which Therese said, in a careless manner, "You needn't be on cere-

mony here, Berger; this is Herr Staiger, and my good friend Clara; we are no strangers. You can bring a chair for yourself. My bridegroom, by-the-by," said she, with a motion of her hand; and, tossing her head, added, "I suppose I need not tell you, dear Clara, that we are making a round of bridal visits. Oh! it is so dreadfully tiresome!"

"I wish you joy," said Herr Staiger, cordially, while shaking hands with the bridegroom, taking the opportunity of giving him a little shove back on his chair; for Herr Berger was sitting on the extreme edge of it, evidently considering this the proper attitude to receive congratulations.

"You must have a great deal to occupy you," said Clara, after looking earnestly at the fair Therese and her meek betrothed.

"Oh! I can manage it," answered Therese, carelessly. "At first I refused to make any visits, but Berger declared it was absolutely necessary; and besides, I must say I felt some curiosity to see my new relations; and, indeed, they were well worth the trouble," said she, laughing. "You should have seen their faces! Berger has what is called an excellent connexion—respectable merchants and shopkeepers, and lawyers and their wives. I assure

you, Clara, two of these ladies looked at me as if just going to swallow a dose of rhubarb; but it diverted me extremely. I did not care a straw. Is it not so, Berger? I was not a bit shy, was I?"

"Oh no," answered the bridegroom, turning round his hat and gazing steadfastly at its black crown. "You pleased everybody."

"We will hope so," said Therese, laughing; "and I liked them well enough. If they behave well to me, I will take care to please them."

"And is your marriage to take place soon?" said Herr Staiger, after looking at the bridegroom with considerable sympathy.

Berger looked askance, and answered, in a spasmodic manner, "Oh yes—very soon—whenever Therese chooses——"

"Of course," said Therese, "the affair must come to an end some day. I hope, dear Clara, we shall remain friends. Have you a moment to give me?" whispered she. "I have something to say to you which concerns us two only."

"If you will go with me to the ante-room," said Clara.

"Oh! that is not at all necessary," answered the other, rising; "come to the stove." She had said all

this in a low tone, and added now, in a louder voice, "Berger, you can talk to Herr Staiger for a few minutes; I have something to arrange with Clara." So saying, she took her arm and went to the stove. Herr Berger, obedient to orders, instantly began to talk of the weather; said he thought it very cold, though the winter was supposed to be at an end, but still there were hopes that, if the seasons followed their usual course, spring would come at last.

Therese looked earnestly at Clara, and said, "Well, how does your affair go on?"

Clara shook her head, and said, in a low voice, "It is a subject on which I never speak."

"And has he never once made an attempt to speak to you?"

"In so far he has," said Clara, casting down her eyes, and colouring, "that I have seen him frequently near me; but I always avoid him."

"You are right there; but don't drive it too far."

"Alas!" said Clara, "if I were to allow him to speak to me, perhaps it would only be to receive fresh reproaches if I would listen to them."

"Perhaps, however, he may regret his conduct, and wish to ask your forgiveness."

"If such were really his feelings he could come here; and he knows I would not refuse to hear his explanation of the past."

"I dare say he has not courage to come, not knowing how you would receive him. You ought to be a little more indulgent, my dear. Do you know," continued Therese, drawing her shawl round her slender figure, "it often happens in this world, that even when a person is entirely in the right, they are sometimes obliged to give way a little if they wish to attain their end."

"Ah!" said Clara, mournfully, "he has broken my heart—I feel it; and the cold tone of bitter contempt in which he told me I was a faithless creature, and that he renounced me for ever, can never be forgotten by me."

"My dear child, rely on it some vile person has made mischief between you."

"I have done nothing—my conscience is clear," said Clara.

"You need not tell me that, my dear creature," said Therese, taking both her hands. "Herr Arthur must have had his mind cruelly poisoned, before he could think you, with your clear, honest eyes, capable of misconduct or treachery. But

answer me on one point. Is there any one who has shown particular interest in you—sent you bouquets, or notes?”

Clara said, “It is disagreeable to allude to such things, but I know you mean well. Yes, one person did persecute me with his attentions, but I always repulsed them in the most decided manner.”

“That has nothing to do with it. Who was it?”

“Count Fohrbach.”

“Ah! his majesty’s aide-de-camp! Not so bad! Here is a thread to guide us. Does Arthur know the count?”

“Yes, intimately. Do you think he has spoken of me?”

“No evil, I am sure, if you had nothing to say to him—oh! you need not give me any assurances on the subject—I know your goodness. The scene you had with Arthur was in Becker’s house? What was he doing there?”

“I don’t know,” answered Clara. “What do you think could take him there?”

Therese shrugged her shoulders, and said:—
“Becker is a bad one, and I know she has been in correspondence with Count Fohrbach on more than one occasion, not too creditable to either. It

is just possible," said she, pausing, "that the count may have had recourse to Becker about you—it is very possible—and Arthur may have heard of it. This is a little light, at all events. And Becker has never been here?" asked she, after another pause.

"Only once in this house; but never with us. She was visiting Frau Wundel, at Christmas, who, with her two daughters, lives on this floor."

"Frau Wundel? Who is she?"

"They are a strange family," answered Clara. "I don't believe they have any occupation. She is a widow, and poor; and I believe lives on alms."

"Then my bridegroom is sure to know her," said Therese; and calling to Berger, she said, "Do you know a family of the name of Wundel?"

Berger turned his head slowly round, and replied: "Oh yes! I know them quite well; they live in this house."

"What kind of people are they?"

"They say they are poor, and unprovided for," said Berger, with a cross face; "and they manage to get a great deal of assistance from various charitable societies."

Therese said, laughing, "Let us make them a visit."

"That was not my intention," said Berger, in rather a decided tone. "I am obliged to go there sometimes in my official capacity, but it is always disagreeable to me."

"Well, go in your official capacity this time, also, if you choose," said Therese, in a positive tone. "I wish it, my dear; and that is enough. Take a couple of gulden in your hand, and pretend you are bringing them a gift from some charitable person, and I will go with you. I like to benefit the poor and deserving," added she, laughing.

At these words the bridegroom rose in his usual stiff and formal manner; but he seemed well trained to obedience, for he attempted no further opposition. He shook hands cordially with Herr Staiger, made a low bow to Clara, and went towards the door, followed by Therese, who kissed her friend's forehead affectionately, saying, "Perhaps all is not yet lost, dear Clara. I will take your affair in hand."

If the Wundel family had been given any hint of the visit they were about to receive, they would either have arranged their room very differently, or they would have been careful to keep their door closed, and the most influential member, Madame Wundel herself, would not so readily have called

out "Come in!" when a gentle knock was heard at the door. This visit took place, unfortunately, at the unlucky hour when the worthy widow, in her overflowing gratitude to Madame Becker, had invited her old friend to take a cup of chocolate with her. On the table there was a smoking can of this strengthening beverage, diffusing an agreeable fragrance; some plates were placed beside it, with pastry, and a large plum-cake, so covered with sugar that it had the aspect of a snowy mountain. There was also bread and butter, and cold meat. The stove threw out a considerable heat; on it stood a kettle of boiling water, and on a small table beside it was a large bottle of punch-essence, which showed that Madame Becker preferred something stronger than chocolate. She must have already taken several glasses, for her cheeks were highly coloured, a foolish grin was on her face, and she was humming a popular melody and staring into her empty glass. She was dressed in mourning, but her simpering face formed a strange contrast to the gloomy hue of her gown. Madame Wundel was sitting near her, dressed in her best, and the very personification of ease and comfort. She had just finished a cup of chocolate, and was smacking

her lips after it. Emilie was engaged in cutting up the large plum-cake; but Louise, the youngest daughter, seemed to take less interest in the party, for she was sitting in a chair a little way from the table, with her back half turned to the others.

The knock was heard, Madame Wundel called "Come in!" and the door opened.

If at this moment the blessed deceased Wundel and Becker had appeared, to carry away their mourning relicts with them to ethereal regions, the consternation could not have been greater than at the sight of "The Secretary for the Modest Poor," who was, on his side, not less astonished, and frowned portentously.

Madame Wundel was so completely taken aback, that she lost all presence of mind and powers of dissimulation, let both her hands fall helplessly on the table, and stared disconsolately at her visitors. Emilie retained more composure, and made a vain attempt to sweep away the plum-cake from the table; but her movement was so sudden, that the pieces already cut fell in confusion on every side, making the cups and saucers clatter. Louise alone kept her seat, shrugging her shoulders, and smiling maliciously.

Madame Becker, who knew Berger well by sight, and who, therefore, fully understood her friend's horror, was the first to recover her senses, and, animated by the strong punch, she shook her neighbour's arm, and said, in a loud vulgar voice, rendered rather thick by the strong liquids she had imbibed, "Oh! Wundel, don't be afraid. Herr Berger will not take it amiss that poor creatures like us should make a jolly day of it, once in a way. How could you help it," added she, winking violently at Madame Wundel, "if it came into my head to treat you to chocolate and cakes?"

"Yes! how could I help it?" said Wundel, eagerly seizing this anchor of hope. "Becker is a good soul, and a kind soul, and remembers the poor. Alas!" continued she, turning up her eyes, piously, "how could such good things, otherwise, ever be seen here?"

Herr Berger seemed perfectly astounded as he looked round the table. He could not comprehend how these "modest poor" could contrive to live so comfortably. But though it was a mystery to him where Madame Wundel got the money for such a feast, he placed no faith in Madame Becker's pretence of having herself furnished these luxuries;

especially when he glanced at Therese, who was contemplating the company with a sarcastic, amused face.

"A chair! two chairs!" cried Madame Wundel, suddenly jumping up. "Herr Berger will, I hope, do us the honour to take a seat at our poor table."

Emilie, too, moved aside, and Madame Becker rose with difficulty. "Is it not the luckiest thing in the world," said she, stammering, "that you are so well provided the very day you are honoured by such distinguished visitors? Mademoiselle Therese, too!" said she, making a low curtsy. "Now I understand! It is a bridal visit; yes, indeed—a bridal visit!" with another deep curtsy.

Madame Wundel, who had not yet quite regained the full use of her tongue, imitated her friend, by repeated curtseys; and Emilie, with a spiteful smile and a deep sigh, echoed the words, "Bridal visit!" Louise had, in the mean time, brought in two chairs.

Herr Berger took one, with some hesitation; and not till he saw that Therese had settled herself comfortably in hers did he venture to seat himself, with a formal bow to the ladies present.

"No! *this* honour! *this* pleasure!" said Madame

Wundel, clasping her hands, "is more than I ever could have dreamt of. Will Mademoiselle Therese condescend to accept my wishes for her happiness, while Herr Berger will, I trust, equally believe what pleasure this visit confers on me. A handsome couple!" said she, apparently aside to Becker, but so loud that it might have been heard in the next room.

Therese, however, did not affect to hear, but looked at Wundel very coolly, and answered: "Yes, we are making our wedding visits, and as we chanced to be in the same house—indeed on the same floor—my bridegroom thought it only polite, knowing you, Madame Wundel, to be a quiet, godly woman, to pay you also a visit."

Herr Berger pursed up his mouth like a carp, turned his eyes to the table on the punch and pastry, and then stared into his hat as if busily studying the name of the firm written there.

Madame Wundel coughed slightly, and said: "So, mademoiselle, you were making a visit on the same floor?"

"I was," answered Therese, "and to one of my best friends—Clara Staiger—whom you probably know," added she, after a slight pause, smiling.

"Oh yes! we know her, in so far as going backwards and forwards in the same house," said the worthy widow, crossing her hands on the table; "only as near neighbours must be acquainted—slightly."

"Oh! only slightly," answered the dancer, looking sharply at each of them in turn. "My friend Clara is a very good, well-conducted girl. Don't you think so?"

"That she is," said Wundel, assentingly; "envy itself cannot deny that."

"Steady, very steady," said Becker, with a sneer; and Emilie added, with a malicious smile: "Quite a pattern—she ought to be an example to all young girls!"

At these words Wundel exchanged a look with Becker, which Therese did not fail to observe.

"Oh! I know how good and excellent she is," continued the dancer. "But," said she, in an impressive tone, "it is the more unaccountable that, in spite of this, unpleasant reports have been circulated about her mode of life—purposely circulated."

"Is it possible!" said the widow, with well-acted surprise. "Did you hear anything of it Becker? or you, Emilie? People are so spiteful!"

Of course no one pretended ever to have heard such reports; and to change this disagreeable subject of conversation, Madame Wundel asked, with her most engaging smile, if she could not have the honour of offering some chocolate to her distinguished guests.

Herr Berger refused at once, but Therese accepted; and she had her reasons—it enabled her to have a few minutes for reflection and observation.

Louise fetched a cup and placed it before Therese, taking the opportunity to join in the universal chorus of congratulation, and added: “Clara must have been delighted to see you, for she is so kind that she rejoices in the happiness of her friends.” Madame Wundel did not fail to dart an angry glance at her daughter, which again attracted Therese’s attention; but Louise, quite indifferent to her mother’s indignation, continued: “It is true, Clara has had her trials lately. Did she speak of them to you?”

“Oh yes! she did,” answered Therese. “I believe it was an unpleasant scene at Madame Becker’s the day poor Marie was buried. What was the story?”

“I can’t tell,” said Becker, after an embarrassed pause. “I don’t exactly know—something connected with a young gentleman.”

“Herr Arthur Erichsen,” rejoined Therese. “I believe he was an admirer of Clara’s—indeed, engaged to her—and he accused her, in your house, of being faithless to him.”

Madame Becker had leaned her arm on the table, and all this time had continued to gulp down strong punch; now she looked up with her red, tipsy-looking eyes, and said: “Yes, something of the kind; he behaved abominably; and if he had spoken as rudely to me, I would have boxed his ears—the blockhead!”

“He is very passionate,” answered the cunning Therese; “it must have been a fit of jealousy. Has any one else ever made love to Clara?”

“Of course,” said Becker, angrily thumping the table. “Because a gentleman comes and talks of honourable intentions, and so forth, is that any reason why the girl should shut herself up entirely?”

“But Clara receives no one,” said Madame Wundel, uneasily, with a sidelong significant glance at Emilie, who bit her lips and looked furiously at Madame Becker. She, however, finished her glass, and said: “A great fuss about nothing; it neither kills nor injures anybody; and Clara would indeed

be a precious fool if she let herself be bullied by the painter."

"But she does, nevertheless," said Wundel, angrily. "Clara is virtue itself; and if any young gentleman were to attempt to visit her, he would get a fine rebuff."

Saying these words, she gave her neighbour a violent kick under the table; but Becker had taken so much punch that she mistook this warning for an accidental push.

"And I say," cried she, mumbling, "that Clara was right to get rid of the painter. The count is a very different man, and I am very glad she listened to him."

Though Therese was much struck by these words, she maintained an indifferent look; indeed, she continued to take her chocolate, smiling, but did not fail to observe Emilie, who clenched her hands and looked in the greatest rage at the old gossip opposite.

"What trash you are talking !" said Wundel, with difficulty repressing her fury. "How can you dare to speak in such a manner of Mademoiselle Clara, the friend, too, of the future Madame Berger? What can you mean?"

Therese set down her cup quietly, and said: "We know perfectly what Madame Becker alludes to—Clara's affair with Count Fohrbach."

"That's it," said Becker, more confusedly than ever; "and that is a capital affair—a lasting one, too. Oh, Wundel, don't be ashamed of your handiwork—you had trouble enough, and managed it famously. Honour to whom honour is due."

"The deuce take you!" said the worthy widow. "Don't talk such horrid nonsense. I am a quiet, humble widow! What have I to do with your affairs? What care I for your wicked transactions? When did we ever help you in them?"

"Ho! ho!" cried Becker, her eyes flashing with rage. "Look at the quiet, humble widow, indeed! You may call them 'wicked transactions' now, but you made a pretty good lump of money by them too."

Herr Berger had slowly raised his eyes from the contemplation of his hat, turned them up impatiently, and whispered to Therese, "I think it would be better for us to leave this house," and attempted to rise; but Therese pulled him down again on his chair, pretended to pick up her pocket-handkerchief, and whispered, "You will accomplish

a good work, Berger, by staying a little longer—assist a friend and unmask a hypocrite.”

In the mean time, Madame Wundel and Emilie had stretched across the table, and stared at Madame Becker like two wild cats who are desirous of tearing out a friend's eyes. Louise was standing at the window, and took no share in the conversation.

“Fie! for shame!” cried Emilie, after a short pause. “Your slanderous tongue is a disgrace to you.”

“Bother!” answered Becker, laughing loudly, “I am not ashamed. I live at the canal in the old barrack ; I stand to what I do, and my name is Becker. I don't deny my actions. Ashamed, indeed ! you ought to be ashamed—you modest poor !” said she, with a spiteful grin. “A pretty concern, to be sure ! Wundel earns money by my business, and then denies it flat. Oh, you horrid woman !”

Wundel and her daughter Emilie had jumped up, and for a moment it seemed as if they would stifle these confessions by a pitched battle, but the widow saw before her the grave, disapproving face of the secretary, so she commanded herself, by a super-human effort gulped down her wrath, and leaning both hands on the table, said : “Herr Secretary,

Heaven forbid that I should allow the evil accusations of this detestable woman to rest on me! Oh no!" said she, in feigned sorrow. "What have I, a poor, friendless widow, but your good opinion, sir? Without your assistance, I should stand alone and forsaken in the world, with my two helpless orphans, without help, without money."

"Without money?" interrupted Becker. "You got a pretty good sum from me, too, for that affair; but nothing remains with you—you are like a sieve. You are——" Here the woman suddenly stopped short in her speech, from no sudden feeling of tenderness towards her old friend, but from the sight of Emilie shaking her fist at her violently behind Berger's chair. She cowered down, and all at once, though too late, seemed to feel that she had gone too far, and that she was only one against three.

"Now listen to me," said Wundel, in a tone of injured innocence; "it is true that this shameless woman asked my assistance in one of her scandalous affairs."

"To bring Clara and Count Fohrbach together?" asked Therese.

"Yes!" screamed Becker, looking at Emilie de-

fyngly, and thumping her fist on the table; "and she did it. She got the girl for me."

The worthy widow cast up her eyes to the ceiling, and said, in a mild tone: "Herr Berger, we must forgive that woman for thinking, from her constant association with vulgar, common people, that there are no right-thinking persons who endeavour, as far as possible, to protect the innocent."

"And so you prevented this wickedness?" asked Therese, anxiously.

"Oh yes, Mademoiselle Therese," continued Wundel. "That woman had recourse to us indeed, but we knew Clara, as you do, to be all that is good, and only with the wish—certainly wholly with that view—to lead Becker off the scent, we undertook the painful commission——"

"To accomplish an interview," said Emilie, coming forward.

"And did it take place?" asked Therese.

"Yes it did," cried Becker, triumphantly. "Believe me, when Wundel fixes her claws on any one, she clutches pretty tight."

"It did take place," remarked Wundel, unheeding her friend's observation; "but I need not tell

you that Clara had nothing whatever to do with it. I sent a substitute."

"Ah! I understand," said Therese, joyfully. "I thank you for this explanation."

Madame Becker did not at first comprehend the meaning of this, but at last it dawned on her that Wundel had substituted another person at the rendezvous. When this fact was fully understood by her, all her features changed; she had been hitherto sitting with a mocking laugh on her face, but now her lips trembled convulsively, her eyes stared, and she cried out, foaming with rage, "So it is thus you deceive my noble connexions, you vile pack!" She had slowly risen, and shoved her face to within an inch of the widow's, who, like the bird under the glare of the rattlesnake, had not the power, unhappily, to move. We say unhappily, for in the next moment Wundel received a slap in the face which upset her backwards into her chair with a shriek. It was droll to see the hasty way in which the secretary for the "Modest Poor" rose, seized Therese's arm, reached the door in two strides, and hurried out of the room. When the door was shut, he remained standing, breathing hard, and put on his hat carefully.

"Heaven be praised!" said Therese, joyfully; "all has turned out well. Believe me, Berger, not for the whole world would I have missed hearing what I have heard. Did the scene annoy you?"

"It has had a good effect on me, too," answered Berger, thoughtfully, while he took out his tablets and drew a thick black line through the name of Widow Wundel.

Therese said : "I would like to speak to Clara, but I believe it is better to try to find Herr Erichsen. Come along, Berger." They descended the stairs, got into the carriage which was waiting for them, and drove off.

We need not assure our readers that Madame Becker did not escape the vengeance of destiny, in the shape of Madame Wundel and her daughters, who gave her a good sound beating; and thus ended the revived friendship of these two worthy, forsaken, and distressed widows.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLARA.

PERHAPS it was by chance that Arthur was this afternoon in the vicinity of the Balken-Strasse; be that as it may, Therese, who was eagerly looking out, caught sight of him in the street next to that where Clara lived. She knocked on the windows, and told the coachman to stop.

Arthur, who had heard his name called, approached the carriage, and was not a little surprised to see that it was the handsome dancer who had called to him. She immediately informed him of the cause of the tour of visits they were making, presented Herr Berger to him, and asked if he had time to come into the carriage for a few minutes. Arthur, as well as Herr Berger, looked at the small two-seated carriage at this proposal, and the former

said, however much delighted he would be to accompany her, he feared there was scarcely room.

"But I must speak to you, and instantly, too," answered the dancer, in a positive tone. "I have something very important to say; and as for room, Berger will be so good as to sit beside the coachman for a short time. You may put up your umbrella, Berger," said she, carelessly, "and then no one will see you, or they will take you for a servant."

"But," said Arthur, in a low voice, "surely you are asking too much."

"And what will the coachman think, my dear?" answered Berger, meekly, though he had already half opened the door to get out.

"Oh! make no fuss," said Therese, impatiently to Arthur. "Come, get in quickly; and as for the coachman," said she, turning to Berger, who was already hovering between the step and the ground, "you can tell him you were too warm in the carriage, and that you got out beside him to enjoy a little fresh air. Berger," whispered she, stooping forward to him out of the carriage, "I don't choose to tell the coachman before Herr Erichsen to drive to the Balken-Strasse, but you see that he does so."

"I might have done that, and got into the carriage again," said the bridegroom, in a grumbling tone.

"Oh! far better as it is," said Therese, clapping the door to suddenly.

Arthur had got into the carriage, smiling; Herr Berger had climbed, with an ill-used face, on the box, spread out his umbrella, and looked quite in his proper place beside the coachman.

"I am just come from Clara," said Therese. Oh! Herr Erichsen, don't turn away in displeasure; believe me, you have behaved shamefully to that charming, excellent girl—to believe that she could deceive you!—she, who is as innocent as a child! I really do not think you ever deserved that heart which you have so recklessly thrown away." And then, without allowing him to speak, she hastily related to him all that had just passed at Widow Wundel's, and entreated him to go straight there himself, where he would find the whole vile set still assembled, and hear the story from their own lips.

The carriage stopped at the well known house. Arthur had listened to Therese with a beating heart; and placing implicit faith in the truth of her

words, all anger and suspicion vanished from his heart, and more passionate love for Clara filled it than ever; and, after hearty thanks, he jumped out of the carriage and hurried into the house.

Therese looked after him for a moment, and, pressing her hand to her eyes, she said to herself: "That is my best wedding-gift." She then knocked again on the window, and called out to Berger, "You may come in again now, my dear."

Arthur did not so quickly arrive at the fourth story; he could not help thinking with remorse of his folly, and could not, in recalling the figure of the girl who had met him when he replaced Count Fohrbach, imagine how he could have for a moment believed it was Clara. All his former suspicions now seemed to him actual insanity, and he bitterly reproached himself for not having gone at once to Clara and stated all the circumstances to her. Sad and dissatisfied with himself, he went slowly up-stairs.

Clara was again seated at her work; but the conversation with Therese had very much shaken her nerves. Latterly she had become more composed, and tried to repress all remembrance of Arthur and his bitter reproaches. She had felt she ought to have shown more spirit, and

to have demanded an explanation of his words; but she had only bowed her head under his anger, which might appear to him a proof of guilt. All prospect of happiness had for ever vanished—not a ray of hope was left; but since the conversation of this morning a feeling had arisen in her heart, she could scarcely say why, that perhaps all was not utterly lost, as if the gloomy night would not last for ever, that perhaps a new day might yet dawn for her, and the sun once more rise clear and bright in her horizon.

Herr Staiger, who saw his daughter absorbed in her thoughts, had again taken up his pen, and continued to write on slowly, not, however, without casting an occasional glance at her.

Clara was startled out of her reverie by seeing her father rise and go towards the door, which was slowly opened, and she heard a voice say, "I beg your pardon, but I knocked several times; you did not hear me."

It was an elderly lady who spoke these words, and though simply dressed, it was evident she belonged to the higher classes. She had a grave, dignified aspect, a sharp nose, and keen grey eyes, with which she minutely inspected the room and its inhabitants.

Poor Clara knew the old lady well, though she had never exchanged a word with her; but with what interest she had looked at her in the theatre, in the street, in church! She had thought her face cold and unsympathising, and had asked Arthur if she was as formal and repulsive at home. Arthur had assured her that his mother had the best heart in the world, and her dignity and stiffness were only assumed in contradiction to her natural kindness.

Herr Staiger had advanced to meet the lady, who was quite unknown to him, and made a respectful bow, and then stepped aside in some embarrassment, as the lady did not speak, but looked earnestly, first at Clara and then at her little brother and sister, who, at sight of a stranger, had pressed close to Clara. Perhaps she remarked the young dancer's look of alarm, for she turned to Herr Staiger with a more friendly expression of countenance, saying, "I have taken the liberty, sir, to visit you, on the subject of a certain affair, if you can spare me a few minutes."

The old man bowed again with some embarrassment, for the lady seemed to imagine that he knew who she was, which was not the case; so he muttered something about honour and pleasure, and

when the lady approached the table, he hastily swept off a mass of books and papers that were on a chair, and offered it to her.

Clara had risen, looking very pale, and her hand, which rested on the table, trembled; her breathing was agitated, and as the stranger bowed to her, the blood rushed to her face, and coloured her hitherto pale features.

The lady seated herself with great composure, and as Herr Staiger, who had remained respectfully standing, showed considerable curiosity in his countenance, she said, "You do not appear to know me; I am the wife of the banker Herr Erichsen."

As soon as the old man heard this name he involuntarily stepped back, looked at the lady in consternation, and with difficulty uttered the words, "Oh! this is too great an honour."

Madame Erichsen neither seemed to expect nor to hear his answer, for she continued looking steadily at Clara, who at first, abashed by her searching gaze, had cast down her eyes in confusion, but soon, in the consciousness of an upright and innocent heart, she again raised them slowly, and looked at the lady with a respectful but steady glance.

"This is your family?" said the latter, after a pause, during which she had looked at each person present.

"Yes, madame," said Staiger, who was unable so quickly to recover from his astonishment, and who kept looking at Clara to try to guess from her face what this visit meant, "it is my family; this is my daughter Clara, that little Marie, and Karl."

"And the other little girl?" asked Madame Erichsen.

"She is a poor orphan," answered Herr Staiger; "a friendless child, who is to live with us."

"Whom you provide for, I suppose?"

"Why yes," said the old man, smiling; "but it is not worth mentioning—the little thing neither costs us trouble nor expense."

"And your wife?" said Madame Erichsen, in a tone of inquiry.

"She has been dead some years. It was a sad blow to me, but a kind Providence permitted Clara to grow up, and she well replaced her mother in care for the little children."

"But you are not much at home, mademoiselle?" said Madame Erichsen, turning to Clara. "I understand that you are much occupied else-

where in the forenoon, and in the evening, too, your time is often not at your own disposal."

Clara looked embarrassed as Madame Erichsen for the first time addressed her, but the words were spoken in a kind and gentle tone, which enabled her to reply, with some degree of composure, "Our mode of life is very humble, and the work light. We have only two rooms and few wants, and therefore the time I can spare is, I find, enough, Madame Erichsen."

"Oh! Herr Arthur's name is Erichsen too," said Master Karl.

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked the lady.

"Oh yes!" said Karl, quite proud of being referred to; "he draws me lovely crocodiles and dragons with huge teeth, and brings me picture-books. But it's a long time since he has been here. I don't know why."

"So it is long since he has been here," answered she, in a still kinder voice.

Clara started when the child named Arthur. Herr Staiger rubbed his hands, coughed several times, and said, "At one time Herr Erichsen occasionally visited us, but not lately. We were formerly engaged on the same work, if I may say so—I was

translating 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' and Herr Arthur drew the illustrations for Herr Blaffer."

Madame Erichsen looked attentively at Clara, who, though still agitated, met the lady's gaze with an honest, open look. Madame Erichsen saw the clear, pure soul of the girl shine forth in the sweet expression of her eyes; she read in them her boundless love for Arthur; and the tears which a moment after dimmed their brightness—those tears of sorrow—did not surprise her, for the boy had said that Herr Arthur never came now.

It was an eventful moment. Herr Staiger coughed and fidgeted, and the two children drew back timidly, awed by the stern face of the stranger. But this face gradually assumed a milder expression, and we may venture to assert that Clara had gained the heart of the old lady. She had come here with the intention of seeing Clara and judging for herself, for she had witnessed her son's anguish in giving up the beloved of his heart, and she firmly believed it was a sacrifice he made to filial love and respect. Now, when she saw how lovely and attractive Clara was, when the charm of her beauty and innocence had worked on her own

heart, she felt first to its full extent the painful struggle her son must have undergone, and the distressing sacrifice he had made to her prejudices. That still darker shadows had interposed between these pure and loving hearts, she did not know. She ascribed it all to Arthur's filial love, and as her pride was flattered by his submission to her will, she had nobly resolved to banish such unworthy feelings for ever from her heart, and to make Arthur happy.

The pause which we here make in our work really took place in the group in Herr Staiger's room. Both father and daughter felt that an explanation was impending. It was a pause of the most painful uncertainty; the moment was now approaching which was to decide the joy or misery of two lives.

"Clara," said the old lady, "I trust you will learn to love me also."

These words were to Clara as if an angel had descended from the skies and inspired her with hope. She pressed her hands on her beating heart. But, alas! these words were only a passing ray of sunshine, and the next moment black threatening

clouds overshadowed the bright heaven she had for an instant contemplated. She thought of that hour beside the coffin of Marie, of the bitter words that had crushed her heart. All was lost for her, and in the excess of her anguish she pressed her hand to her eyes and burst into tears. She suddenly felt two hands seize hers and endeavour gently to remove them; she trembled violently, and the blood rushed to her face. She involuntarily closed her eyes, but only for a second, for a well-known voice met her ear, saying, in low and tender tones, "My own darling Clara! my best beloved!"

At the first glance, she could see no one before her till she looked down and saw her lover at her feet, kissing her hands passionately, and looking up imploringly at her sweet face, saying, "Oh! my darling Clara, can you forgive me? my innocent angel! I know all, and love you more fondly than ever."

How Arthur had got into the room was incomprehensible to them all, but there was no possible doubt that there he was, and that he was overflowing with joy and happiness. He sprang up hastily, without letting go Clara's hands, and drew her gently towards his mother. "This is my Clara,

dearest mother," said he; "you no longer frown on our love?"

Madame Erichsen coughed loudly, but on this occasion it was to conceal her emotion. Herr Staiger tried to smile, but tears rolled over his cheeks, so that little Marie looked quite annoyed, and stared at them all by turns. The boy alone seemed to think of the practical side of Arthur's return; he looked with delight at his friend, and saw in his mind's eye toys without end, and dragons with splendid tails and teeth. We now close the door on the joyful scene, and also end our chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CATASTROPHE.

BEFORE Baron Brand's house stood a heavy travelling-carriage with four horses; it was packed, the lamps lighted, and a servant in plain livery standing at the door. A maid was on the back seat wrapped in a large cloak. The servant drew his leather cap more over his face, and said to one of the postilions: "They will soon be off now, I think." With these words he took up two cloaks, a large and a small one, which were hanging over the door of the carriage, and went into the house with them.

The baron was in a small salon, standing near an arm-chair, in which Baroness von Weiss was seated. Though the room was very warm she was trembling from head to foot, and her head sunk on her breast.

Close beside her stood the fine boy whom we have already seen, his head leaning on her shoulder, and his eyes fixed on Baron Brand, who was passing his fingers through the child's thick curly hair fondly, with a melancholy smile.

"So now all is ready," said the baron, after a pause. "You are to go to Dornhofen, the estate which I yesterday purchased for you. Beil will follow you with the papers to-morrow morning, probably. Count Fohrbach told me he had heard to-day, from one of the ministers, that your divorce will be pronounced a couple of weeks hence; then, dearest sister, you are once more free, and can live happily with your darling boy."

The baroness, after fondly embracing her child, said, in a low voice, "But, dearest Henry, you have not yet answered me. Why do you send me away from you? Or if you think it is better I should not stay here, why will you not go with me? I cannot bear to lose sight of you. I know you will think me superstitious, but I feel as if some misfortune threatened us. You have enemies."

"But he has a dagger—a sharp dagger, too!" said the boy; "and he does not care for enemies then."

The baroness rose suddenly from her chair and threw her arms round her brother's neck. "Henry!" said she, "do not send me away; or come with me, and we will pass such a happy, peaceful life together."

"Too late! too late!" said he. And the tone in which he said this was so icy cold, so full of misery, and his eyes so wild, that the poor woman looked at him in terror.

"My Lucie! my darling, go now, or this melancholy hour of leave-taking will have no end. Farewell, my child," said he, fondly embracing the boy. "Farewell, my own beloved sister! my all in this world!" After these words, which he uttered in a passionate tone, he gently unloosed her hands from his neck, pressed them to his lips in silence, looked up in anguish, and saying, "God bless you for ever, my darlings both!" he rang the bell violently, and when the servant came in, said, "Bring the baroness's cloak." Lucie turned to her brother, and gave him both her hands, which he fondly kissed. Yet once more he kissed the boy's fair forehead and bright eyes, hurried to the carriage with them, and waving his hand as a final adieu, he returned to his room. His step was so

faltering that he was obliged to support himself by the table. A faintness seized him, which, however, passed away in a few minutes. "It is, perhaps, for the best," said he; "but it is the bitterest hour of my life. Farewell, my loved ones—farewell for ever in this world. A merciful bullet would have spared me this hour of agony," said he, half aloud to himself; "but the worst is past, the rest is mere child's play." He paced up and down the room for a few minutes, and quickly regained his composure, and no one could now have perceived any trace of the storm which a few minutes previous had raged in his heart.

"Major von S——," said the servant. The baron received him with much cordiality.

"Your cheerfulness might reassure me," said the major, "if——"

"Oh! no ifs," said the baron, smiling; "rather answer a question which is of some importance to me. Has anything been said in society of a duel which is to take place immediately between Herr von Dankwart and myself?"

"On the contrary," said the major, "Herr von Dankwart flatly contradicts the report."

"Ah!" said the baron, "he wishes to keep the

affair secret; but, between ourselves, he has called me out."

"Through whom?"

"That is my secret."

"I can't at all understand it," said the major, shaking his head. "Herr von Dankwart openly declares that you are an excellent fellow, and never had the least intention to offend him; it was a mere masquerade pleasantry."

"Ah! but since that time I have written him a very unpleasant letter. I was out of humour. We are not always able to exercise proper self-control."

The major looked steadfastly at the baron, who was busily arranging the pin in his neckcloth, and said, significantly, "Baron, you are seeking a duel!"

"At all events, I am not disposed to refuse one," replied he; "and if you wish to do me a real service, an act of friendship, spread a report confidentially among our friends that to-morrow I am to have a meeting which may be fatal."

"With Herr von Dankwart?"

"You need not name any one—the fact is enough. Do you understand me?"

The latter seized his hand, pressed it, and said, with much emotion, "Yes, baron, I believe I do."

"Forgive my sending you away, but I must be alone."

Once more they exchanged a cordial pressure of the hand, and the major left the room.

The baron remained for a few moments sunk in thought, and said, "I feel like a tree in winter on a lofty mountain; one leaf after another falls from my branches, and I hear the distant rushing of the storm which I cannot escape. But away with these gloomy images!" He rang the bell again, and said to the servant, "Send Herr Beil to me." He soon came—the same kind soul he always had been, but now with a certain gravity on his features and demeanour. He had a quantity of papers in his hand, and looked like a private secretary. They sat down, and the baron looked carefully over the various documents Herr Beil showed him. "You will allow," said he to Beil, with a smile, "that my affairs are all in excellent order?"

"First rate," replied the secretary; "all is clearly arranged."

"According to the schedule I have given you," said the baron, leaning back in his chair, "you

would be able to manage the property of the baroness without any assistance?"

"Certainly I could," said Beil; "but I hope you have no intention of leaving us?"

"Yes, I have a far journey before me. By-the-by, did you deliver my message to the duke?"

"I did so, and his highness said he would be here punctually to the moment."

"My sister is gone," said the baron, with a heavy sigh.

"I had the good fortune to see the baroness and also my young charge," said Beil.

"My dear Beil," said the baron, earnestly, "it is my most anxious wish that you should continue to reside with the boy. I am happy to see that he is much attached to you. That you may stay with him for many long years, is my earnest hope. You will find among my papers a provision for yourself, and also a sum set apart for what the world calls 'doubtful characters,' who may apply to you in my name for assistance, in case I may be long absent."

The baron's old faithful valet opened the door; his usually composed face was distorted with fear, and he stammered forth, "I don't know what it means, sir, but when I looked out of the window

just now by chance, I saw two men stationed one at each side of this door, and by the gas-light a suspicious glimmer of brass buttons, such as are only worn by soldiers or the police. I went down stairs instantly, and found they were policemen, who refused to allow me, your own servant, sir, to leave the house."

"Already!" said the baron, coolly, looking at his watch. "But I see it is a quarter to nine o'clock. My good Beil," he said, turning to him, "we have talked too long. How unexpectedly things sometimes turn out. I had intended to take a hasty farewell, and then I detained you, because I like you so much, that somehow on this evening I could not bear to take leave of one of my best friends with a mere pressure of the hand."

"And why is the house guarded?" asked Herr Beil, in surprise. "Did you know of it, sir?"

"So thoroughly," replied he, smiling, "that I can inform you of every detail likely to occur. At nine precisely the president of police will himself arrive in all his dignity to arrest me."

"Heavens! And you can say that with so composed a face!"

"I say it composedly enough," answered the

baron, "for there is a considerable difference between intending to arrest a person and accomplishing it." The baron then dismissed the servant, and said to Beil, "I knew all this was approaching, and I might yesterday have escaped all danger of arrest; but if I had secretly fled from the field, I sanctioned every calumny and every false report, and my name would have been forever tarnished; and for my sister's sake, this shall never be. But," said he, "I hear a carriage. It must be the duke."

"His highness the duke's carriage is in sight," announced the old servant, with a very pale face, adding, in a whisper, "The president of police is approaching the house."

"I shall be happy to receive him," said the baron, in a low tone. "Frederick, place my hat and cloak near the door, and under the cloak the new pistols I purchased to-day."

"Pistols?" asked Herr Beil, in a tone of alarm.

"Duelling pistols," answered Herr von Brand. "I have to-morrow a hostile meeting. Now, Herr Beil, be so good as to place yourself near the door. To your place, Mr. Secretary."

At this moment the duke entered in his usual

noisy manner, laughing. "I beg your pardon, my dear baron," said he, "but in your house below I see some very suspicious faces. What on earth have you to do with police officials?"

"Cœur de rose! is it not disagreeable?" said the baron, laughing; "but your highness shall soon know the cause. I would not have requested you to come here for any slight reason. You often did me the honour to assure me of your gratitude and of your assistance if necessary. I claim this gracious promise this evening."

"Do so, my good baron; you will see whether you shall find me ungrateful. I can never forget what I owe you, though our last stratagem utterly failed. I suppose you know that Count Fohrbach's betrothal to the fair Eugenie is declared, and that the marriage is shortly to take place? The ungrateful girl!"

"Yes, she certainly did not seem to understand her own interest," said the baron, with an ironical smile.

"But quick, baron," cried the duke; "how can I serve you? You know I am generally in a hurry, and particularly this evening, for a new maid of honour is to be presented in my mother's circle in the place of the proud Eugenie."

"I hope you will be more successful there. But to the point. Your highness heard some reports about me to-day?"

"Why, yes," said the duke, "of a duel with Herr von Dankwart; he, indeed, denies the thing entirely, but every one is talking of it. Ah! I suppose the police wish to stop it?"

"So it appears."

"Then you are under arrest in your own house?"

"I suspect I shall be."

"Oh, I won't permit that. I suppose you want my assistance to deceive the police and to bully their president."

"Precisely so," said the baron; and pointing to Beil, he added, "Remember that there stands your highness's secretary. A clever young surgeon," whispered he, "whose services I may require to-morrow."

"I understand," said the duke; "my secretary, whom I shall take the liberty to send home as soon as the president appears. Have you any further hints to give me?"

"You are indignant, gracious sir, to find police agents on the steps of a house which you honour by a visit, and command their instant removal."

“The president of police,” announced the servant, in a trembling voice.

The baron turned quickly, and bowing, said, “I am happy to receive your excellency. It is late, but your visit was not wholly unexpected, as my servant informed me some of your people have been awaiting your orders here for an hour past.”

That his excellency felt extreme embarrassment in entering the house of the baron—yesterday considered as his future son-in-law, to-day, oh horror! a suspected criminal—was not surprising. He was certain of the baron’s guilt, for the four officials who had chased him on the night of the ball had given an exact description of his costume, and stated that the fugitive had disappeared in the garden of the president’s house. Dreadful enough for his excellency, for the baron had not only taken refuge within his walls, but had actually escorted his daughter to the court ball as her bridegroom. Enraged by all these facts, the president had arrested the landlord of the Fuchsbau, but he denied everything. Herr Strauber, however, confessed all, without much cross-questioning. And with his usual hypocrisy declared he even rejoiced in his imprisonment, as in this quiet cell he could reflect on his past life.

He was a clever rogue, and hoped, by affecting bitter remorse, to escape punishment.

The president had intended simply to say, "In the king's name!" and arrest the baron, and he was very disagreeably surprised by the presence of the duke, whose laugh and tone both sounded very defying when he addressed him, saying, "Much ado about nothing, your excellency, I should say! We know the cause of your visit, don't we, baron?"

"Perfectly," answered he. "Won't your excellency do me the honour to be seated?"

The president was more and more astonished. He had flattered himself that his appearance with his armed escort would cause the most frightful consternation in the baron, who seemed not to see anything strange in his visit, and the duke coolly said it was "much ado about nothing!"

His highness now remembered his secretary, and stretching himself in his arm-chair, said to Beil, "You may now go; I have no further commands for you."

The latter had concealed himself so entirely behind the *portière*, that the president could not see him, and he instantly, on hearing the duke's words, retreated into the next room, but the servant entered

to say, "The police officers refuse to allow your highness's secretary to pass?"

"How is that, your excellency?" asked the duke, indignantly; "not allow my secretary to pass! This cannot be by your orders; it must be a mistake, which I beg you will instantly rectify."

The president bowed, and said he would give orders to allow his highness's secretary to leave the house.

"I must at the same time remark," said his royal highness, "that it is rather a strong measure to place police round a house in which I am, and if you don't perceive this, president, allow me to tell you of it."

"I assure your highness I had not the most remote idea of meeting you here," answered his excellency. "No idea whatever!" repeated he, with a side-glance at the baron, "but I shall instantly do what respect for your highness certainly demands."

After a deep obeisance the president went into the next room, and was heard calling out, in a loud voice, "The secretary of his highness to pass, and the police to retire from the house." No one, however, heard him whisper to one of the commissaries

of police to enter the ante-room, and to hide himself in the recess of a window.

"Bravo! your highness," whispered the baron. "Now get me off as quickly as possible."

The *portière* rustled, and the president returned, to whom the duke said, yawning, and as if much bored, "It is rather dull here this evening, baron—I shall leave you. Shall I see you to-morrow?"

"Assuredly, sir, if my arrest is over."

"Oh! the president will be merciful; he must not seek to deprive young people of all freedom of action."

The president bowed in silence, and as the baron did the same, without, however, moving from his place, the duke said to the latter, "I hope that at least you will accompany me to the limits of your kingdom, for I have something to say to you."

Herr von Brand shrugged his shoulders, and looked at the president with a smile, who seemed in doubt what to do; but after a short pause he said, "Your highness is so good as to remind us of our duty. I will also have the honour to accompany you to your carriage."

When they entered the ante-room the duke remained standing, not knowing exactly what to do

next. But a sudden thought struck him when he heard the president call out, "The gentleman now coming out is to pass."

He stretched out his hand to the baron, all three being on the landing-place of the stairs. The commissary had left his place in the window, and drawn near the door, but the baron had exchanged a significant look with his faithful old valet, who apparently, quite unintentionally, stood holding the handle of the door. The duke, who had begun to descend the stairs, stopped short, and said, "How could I be so forgetful? I have still a communication of considerable importance for your excellency's private ear." So saying, he seized the old gentleman's coat by the button-hole, and drew him gently back into the ante-room. "This evening," said he, pronouncing his words very slowly, "there was a family dinner—only eight covers." The duke still held the president's coat, and kept retreating further into the room, followed by the president, who was curious to hear this important communication, but who did not lose sight, for all that, of the baron, who was leaning quietly on the banisters, having apparently stepped back through discretion. "Eight covers," said the duke; "his majesty was most con-

descending. During dessert their majesties spoke of the singular event which had lately occurred—you remember it, president?”

“I really do not know to what your highness alludes,” said the latter, making a sign to his commissary to keep watch on the stairs.

“How very forgetful you are, my good friend,” said the duke, who had contrived to place himself close to the door. “I mean that unlucky occurrence with Baroness Weiss.” Saying these words, he had manœuvred so cleverly that the commissary of police could not pass through the doorway without shoving against his highness.

The baron still continued to lean on the banisters, and on seeing this, the commissary did not think it necessary to make any violent effort to get out on the landing-place.

The valet outside held the door with a trembling hand, and looked intently at the duke. He felt that at this eventful moment a glance from him must be his guide.

“Your conduct is highly approved of,” whispered the duke—“very highly indeed.” He raised his eyes, looked significantly at the valet, and in a moment the door was closed and bolted. The pre-

sident called out loudly, the commissary rushed to the window, and while the duke was laughing as merrily as a schoolboy, there was heard in the street below the rolling of wheels and the quick trot of two impatient horses, who, tired of standing so long, set off now full speed over the pavement. In a few seconds the sounds became fainter, and were speedily lost in the distance.

The commissary of police tried to throw up a window, but it was barred by heavy shutters, and before he could withdraw the bolts the distant sounds of the carriage showed him that his efforts were vain.

The duke had thrown himself into a chair, and the more fury the president showed, the more he laughed.

"We have fortunately a mounted gendarme close by," burst forth the president. "I will send him after the carriage instantly."

"The gendarme would require a good horse to catch my two fleet Hungarians," said the duke, triumphantly. "This capital trick is worth a million."

The president stared at the duke, clasped his hands in despair, and said, "You can be amused

with this sad business—— But no! your highness cannot possibly know that——”

“Oh! I know all about it,” said the duke, nodding.

“That the baron was about to be—arrested?”

“To prevent a duel with Herr von Dankwart.”

At these words the president first stepped back, and then came close up to his highness, who, struck by the singular expression of his face, ceased laughing, and looked at him in surprise.

“No! no! no!” cried the president. “Oh the folly of young people! The baron—a pretty baron!—was not to be arrested on account of a duel. Does your highness know who you have assisted to escape?—The chief of a band of robbers!—the most dangerous man in the kingdom! Merciful powers! I had him safe, and now——!”

The duke was transfixed with amazement. Every trace of a smile had disappeared, and he said, with a severe frown, “It was your duty, sir, to warn me.”

“Your highness never allowed me to utter a word,” said the other, dolefully. “It is a bad business, sir. I should certainly not have listened to any remonstrances even from your highness, but

you will do me the justice to state to his majesty candidly the part you have acted."

"The best thing you can now do, president, is to wait till to-morrow, and not to spread the affair further at present. Come home with me in my carriage, and tell me all about the baron. How horrible! The chief of a band of robbers!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHASSEUR'S REPORT OF A CATASTROPHE.

WINTER was now nearly gone, and early spring was gladdening all hearts by some bright, cheerful days—days on which the land, warmed by the sun, yields an earthy but agreeable fragrance; when the grass-stalks seem to stretch themselves, as it were, and the branches show indications of soon being covered with green buds. Early beds of flowers are by degrees freed from their winter coverings; the flowers which slept, covered with earth, during the long winter are now enticed to appear above the surface; plants hitherto encased in glass are allowed once more to breathe fresh air; sunshine and pure breezes again stream with reviving power on the tender, trembling leaves.

This process was going on in the small garden

surrounding Count Fohrbach's pavilion. Though four o'clock in the afternoon, the windows of his salon were open, and the rather chill air which streamed in was tempered by the bright burning fire in the chimney.

The count was not in his salon, but in his dressing-room adjoining, of which the door was also open, admitting the spring breezes. Major von S—— was sitting beside him on a sofa, and both were smoking cigars.

“On such a day as this,” said the count, “when winter is perceptibly passing away, I feel as if I had just escaped from a prison. Behind me, dark, black walls, the hitherto closed, gloomy doors now thrown wide open; and before me, freedom, blue skies, and balmy breezes.”

“You will feel that more keenly at this moment,” said the major, smiling, “because a spring of love and happiness awaits you, which life only grants once in this world in all its brightness.”

“When I think of Eugenie and all my happiness,” said the count, “it is almost too much. I can scarcely realise such felicity!”

The door opened, and the count's valet said to him: “The chasseur wishes to see you, sir; he is just returned.”

"Send him in instantly," said the count, hastily rising. "Remain where you are," continued he to the major, who had also risen; "I wish to have no mysteries for you in this case. What the *chasseur* has to tell me relates to a person interesting to us both, and whom we have often discussed."

"Baron Brand?"

The count continued: "Yes, Baron Brand. He begged me yesterday to let him have my *chasseur*. I don't know why he would take none of his own people to his meeting with Herr von Dankwart. They were to have a duel this morning."

"That is strange," said the major, thoughtfully. "I spoke to Dankwart about it only last night, and he assured me there was not a word of truth in the affair."

"Discretion on his part!"

"He even said that the baron had written him a conciliatory letter."

"Let us hear the *chasseur's* story. I am almost certain that we shall find the case very different."

Franz now came into the room, and when the count looked at him he started. "Ah!" said he, to the major, "the affair is serious. I never saw that man's calm face so disturbed before."

And so it was, indeed. Franz Karner, who slowly came forward at a sign from the count, instead of his usual upright, firm bearing, was now bent. His face was as pale as death, his eyes red, and his lips trembled.

The major, who had risen from his chair, looked in consternation, first at the chasseur, and then at his friend.

“Ah, you are returned!” cried the latter. “Speak!—what has happened? A misfortune, I am sure!”

The chasseur could not speak, but groaned and bowed his head.

“Has anything happened to the baron?” continued Fohrbach, impetuously. “Compose yourself, and relate the affair to us in detail. My good fellow, be a man!” said he, after a pause, when he saw the chasseur vainly trying to speak, and that his eyes were filled with tears. “Come, relieve our anxiety.”

The chasseur slowly opened his lips, after covering his eyes with his hands, and then he said, in a deep, low voice, “Before I inform you, sir, of the events of yesterday and to-day, I must, in justification of my singular agitation, tell you that I knew

Baron Brand well, and long before I entered your service."

"I know that; it was he who recommended you to me."

"He was my constant benefactor. I loved and esteemed him beyond all others," he added, in a lower voice. "Come what may for me, I must confess I knew all his circumstances."

"I thought you did," said the count; "but for me, Baron Brand shall ever be what I knew him, and of other circumstances I wish to know nothing."

The *chasseur* sighed, and continued: "You allowed me, sir, at the baron's request, to accompany him. For this purpose I was waiting with a carriage for him last night, at nine o'clock, at the E'schen-Gate. These were his orders."

"Was it a travelling-carriage?" asked the count.

"No, sir; a light *coupé*, with four fleet horses. About ten o'clock I heard a carriage approaching at full speed. It was the equipage of Duke Alfred. Though it was very dark I recognised the coachman, who drew up his horses close to the *coupé*. The baron jumped out, and the carriage which had brought him instantly returned to the town. The baron greeted me kindly, told me to drive along

the chaussée to the next stage, and instantly got into the carriage."

"How was he dressed?" asked the count.

"He had a large cloak on over his usual dress, and was armed with two pistols."

The count gave the major a significant look, and said, "Was no one with him?"

"No one. I mounted the box, and we drove away. The postilions, whom I had paid well, drove so quickly that we soon arrived at the first stage. There we changed horses and drove on."

"To Königshofen?" said the major. "It is the usual place."

"To Königshofen," continued the chasseur. "The baron went into the inn, ordered a private room, and desired me to go to bed, but to waken him this morning at dawn of day. I dismissed the postilions, but I could not go to rest: on the contrary, I wandered about the house for hours, and remarked that a light continued to burn steadily in the baron's room. He, too, had not gone to bed; for when, according to his orders, I opened his door just as day was breaking, he was seated at his table, sealing letters. 'Ah! you are here already!'

said he. 'Time has passed quickly!' Every word he said, sir, is impressed on my memory. The day began to dawn," continued the chasseur, "the baron arranged his toilette, and, taking out his handkerchief, he said, 'I wish I had remembered to drop some *cœur de rose* on it. I love the perfume, and it would have reminded me of many happy hours.' He gave me some letters for the post, and took his pistols with him under his cloak. We left the house, went through Königshofen, and ascended the hill behind it."

"That path leads to a solitary plantation. I know it well," said the major, thoughtfully.

"And what did you think of all this?" said the count to his chasseur.

"The baron asked me the same question as we were climbing the steep path. I answered him, 'I supposed his purpose was a duel, but that I neither saw an adversary nor seconds.'

"'They are all coming from the other side,' answered he; 'and you have sense enough to see that this is an affair which requires perfect secrecy.'"

The major exchanged a significant look with his friend.

“‘Yes, I am about to be engaged in a duel,’ thus the baron continued, sir, ‘and I have a dangerous opponent. I know his skill in shooting,’ said he, with a strange smile; ‘he never fails an ace at five-and-twenty paces.’

“‘Then he must be almost as good a shot as you, sir,’ I took the liberty of remarking. On which he answered:

“‘Why, about the same. The issue is very doubtful, for he has the first shot; therefore follow exactly the directions I give you. We must part here—take out your watch and set it by mine.’ It was six o’clock. ‘In half an hour all will be over. Then you are to continue the same path we are now on, which will lead you to a plantation—you will see yourself what is to be done next.’ I entreated him to allow me to go with him, but he repeated his order more peremptorily; and the baron could be very stern and determined sometimes,” said the chasseur, thoughtfully. “He took leave of me, and gave me his pocket-book to pay for the post-horses back to the town. Then he continued to ascend through the trees, and my eyes followed him. Sir, when I saw him going along with his usual firm, free step, so light and

active, in all the pride of manhood, I felt as if my heart would break."

"And why did you not follow him?" asked the count, with emotion.

"His commands were positive. And then I knew my former master well—he would have shot me down if I had followed him, without my death," added he, with a mournful smile, "preventing his duel. He stood still occasionally, looking down on the valley. The city is seen at a distance in the plain. He gazed at it several times, and then at me; and when he saw me waiting patiently on the spot where he had left me, he gave me a friendly wave of the hand, and in a moment he had disappeared among the trees."

The chasseur had spoken these last words scarcely audibly; then saying, "Forgive me, but I cannot help it!" he burst into tears, and remained for a few minutes with his face buried in his hands.

The count and the major looked at the chasseur in the greatest anxiety, who at last raised his head, and continued: "I was then alone in the wood. These were dreadful moments! I listened breathlessly to every sound. When a wild animal's tread disturbed the dry branches, or when a

withered leaf fell to the ground close to me, I started, fearing to hear something appalling. Oh! sir, listening alone, every nerve excited in that solitary wood, the stillness seemed to me more solemn than in a churchyard. All at once a shot was fired. I have heard shots fired in dreadful circumstances, but none ever unnerved me but that one. A second instantly followed. I looked at my watch, and seeing that it was half-past six, I rushed up the steep path, but amid all my haste I sometimes paused, trembling, and listened. What would it avail to arrive quickly on the spot? Already I had a mournful presentiment of what I should find there! Then I tried to deceive my anxiety by the false hope of hearing other footsteps; but, alas! I heard nothing. The stillness in the wood was most oppressive; only the leaves rustled under my feet, a bird occasionally fluttered on the branches, and the monotonous, melancholy cry of the cuckoo was heard in the distance."

"At last you found him?" said the count, in an excited tone, as the chasseur suddenly stopped and closed his eyes, as if to shut out some frightful spectacle.

"In the plantation, where he had already told me I should find him."

“Alone?”

“Quite alone.”

“And——”

“Dead,” said the chasseur, with tears in his eyes.
“The ball had gone right through his heart.”

“Dreadful!” said the major. “And you saw no one? and you heard no steps retreating?”

“I saw nothing but the sun, which cast its rays on his pale features, and there were no sounds but the loud cry of grief with which I cast myself down beside his corpse; for, sir, I dearly loved my former master and benefactor, Baron Brand.”

“And what do you think of this history?” asked the count of the chasseur, after a long pause.

“I only permit myself to think as he told me,” answered the chasseur, in a solemn voice. “I am ready to stake my life on the fact that he fell in a duel, for so he wished it to be believed.”

“Yes, that was his last wish,” said the count, mournfully. “His career was ended, and, as he told me at the masked ball he was resolved to die an honourable death, and Herr von Dankwart is, with all his weaknesses, a man of honour.”

“But,” said the major, “I feel convinced that he will obstinately deny the whole affair.”

“From discretion, as I before said,” replied the count. “The world will believe in the duel, and this was the dying wish of the unhappy man. May he rest in peace!”

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

A BETROTHAL had been celebrated in the Banker Erichsen's house. His lady sat as stiff as ever in the corner of her sofa, but an unusual gentleness shone in her features, her eyes looked kindly on all, and she frequently turned to Herr Staiger, who seemed her particular favourite. She liked him because she esteemed him ; he had a kind heart and an upright nature, and, having read a great deal, had much information. And this very day, in the course of conversation, it appeared that his parents had been many years ago intimate friends of the parents of Madame Erichsen, which was another tie.

Marianne had received her brother's betrothed in the most cordial manner. Indeed, from the first

hour she saw Clara she loved her like a sister, and she told her mother that, having herself no children, she would adopt Catherine's little orphan, and provide for her.

The worthy banker had enjoyed his good dinner and champagne, and was thankful that peace was restored in his family, and that he had now every prospect of leading the easy, quiet life he liked. Bertha still refused to return to her husband, but had not as yet commenced any proceedings to obtain a divorce; but Alphonse had written to his father-in-law to entreat his mediation with his wife, confessing his errors, and saying he meant to travel for a few weeks, and that on his return he hoped by his future good conduct to atone to his wife for his levity and misconduct.

It is no easy matter to wind up a story like the present; in fact, such a story never concludes. Except the few whose death we have unhappily been obliged to describe, all the other personages of our true history are in the most perfect health, though their actions might continue to furnish many other examples of bondage; but it is the duty of an author not to tire out the patience of his readers, and to seize the first good opportunity to

bid farewell to the public, and to close his book. We think we cannot choose a more favourable moment than the present, and will only add a few words as to the fate of some of those who have appeared in our pages. We feel it the more requisite to do this, as two small tales of slavery thus come to light, the force of which details our reader will be better able to appreciate if either he or any of his friends are in a similar position.

A wedding usually follows a betrothal; and this was the case both with Count Fohrbach and Arthur Erichsen. Though their friendship was as cordial as ever, they had latterly not met very often; but it happened by chance that their weddings took place on the same day, and almost at the same hour they left the city on their marriage tour. Count Fohrbach travelled towards the north, where his family had extensive possessions; but Arthur to Italy, that fair and lovely land which he had so often longed to see. Clara's farewell to her father was rather painful, for Herr Staiger feared that, at his age, the projected separation of six months might be an eternal one. But the old gentleman's anticipations were not realised on this occasion; on the contrary, when Clara returned in half a year she found him well and happy, though he no

longer resided in the Balken-Gasse. Madame Erichsen had recommended her favourite so strongly to her husband, that Herr Staiger was, in consequence, made one of the head clerks in the banking-house, where, through his talents and punctuality, he was of the greatest use.

Arthur and his fair bride lived in a kind and select circle of friends; and if some, recalling Clara's former position in society, did not show much courtesy towards the young couple, they could afford to smile at such slights, happy in each other and their devoted love.

We must linger a few moments more with the Erichsen family. Herr Alphonse returned from his excursion a few days after Arthur's marriage; but his relative position with his wife was entirely changed. The sceptre which had fallen from his hands on the eventful day of Mademoiselle Therese's visit, Marianne had wisely seized; and, instead of the imperious master whose nod or frown she had once so quickly obeyed, he now sank into a very slave, who humbly hastened on every occasion to comply with the (not unreasonable, we must say) wishes of his wife. If he ever made an attempt to break these chains, his mother-in-law looked at him with her sharp grey eyes; and at last the very

sight of her long, dignified nose made him rush out of the room, and take refuge in the counting-house, where his meek father-in-law tried to comfort him by saying, "Believe me, it is much better for us to allow our wives to have their own way. My wife has ruled both me and my children for thirty years, and it has been all for the best. The Five per Cents. have risen too, and that is our chief affair."

An unexpected obstacle arose to the divorce between Dr. Erichsen and his wife. This was the refusal of Bertha herself. We know that she had taken refuge with her mother, no longer to be obliged to submit, as she said, to be treated like a slave by her husband. She had fancied herself and her home to be as when she had left it, but she found both much changed. She could not forget that she had ruled a house of her own, and had two sweet children; and she could still less bear that she, who had always been first in her mother's eyes, should now be the second. We say the second, because her mamma, grown old and sickly, had, at the marriage of her daughter, engaged a house-keeper—a tall, wiry-looking woman, with a very sharp tongue—who not only ruled over her mistress and her household, but tyrannised over them des-

potically. Madame Bertha had not been four weeks in her mother's house when she felt herself perfectly miserable, for her mother's humour was insufferable, and the tall, thin housekeeper made a point of constantly alluding to the joys of matrimony; whereas she maintained that a divorced woman was an anomaly, and that nobody could tell to what class they belonged.

So Bertha began to make approaches to her former home by seeing her children constantly, though privately. When the doctor heard of it, he made no objections; indeed, he still felt so much love for his wife, that he could not have resisted making another attempt at reconciliation, had not Arthur on the day of his marriage extracted a faithful promise from him to take no step till his return which Bertha could consider as conciliatory on his side, saying, "If you soon give in, Edward, the same thing will occur again within six months."

The fair Augusta was for some time obliged to accept condolences instead of congratulations, as Baron Brand had been considered her declared bridegroom from the eventful night of the masked ball. The president wisely followed the advice of his lady, and never alluded to anything suspicious in the baron's life, but they lamented his untimely

death in a duel; and in a short space of time Augusta, whose vanity had been far more engaged than her heart, formed a new engagement, which, fortunately for her, ended more happily than the previous one.

We must not forget to say that Herr Beil lived happily with his young charge, and as steward to the fine property of Baroness von Weiss; nor did he, in his present independence, forget his former *protégé*, Auguste. Two young men had purchased the house and business of Herr Johann Christian Blaffer and Co., and Beil, by paying a certain sum, procured Auguste a situation as one of the head clerks there. Herr Blaffer had made it a condition of the sale that he was to have the situation of under clerk, for, being utterly ruined, he was only too thankful to be able to earn his daily bread. We need not describe the feelings with which he sat at his desk. He pressed his emaciated hands to his eyes, half out of his senses from shame and mortification; and whenever he saw Auguste enter the shop he was the more vividly reminded of the days when he starved and bullied his apprentice, and of his fair and faithless sister, who had never again been heard of since the night of the robbery.

When Count Fohrbach, the day of his marriage,

left the city, it was in a large, roomy travelling-carriage; on the back seat were Franz Karner and Henriette. They had only become recently acquainted, so their conversation was not very animated. She looked right and left, first at the houses past which they were driving, then at the poplar avenues, and other objects. At the second stage—the place was called Königshofen—Count Fohrbach jumped out of the carriage, and said to the chasseur, who had opened the door for him, “It was here you went out?” pointing to the wood, which was on an eminence behind the village.

“It was so,” said the chasseur; and when he had again climbed into his seat, he remained standing, and gazed long, long at the wood.

The carriage drove on, and soon other woods and other paths interposed between him and that fatal spot. His heart was so full, that he could not resist saying a few words to Henriette, though a stranger, of that most unhappy day, and of the young baron who had met his death in that wood. How astonished was he to find that Henriette knew all the details of the melancholy event, and that she had known the baron, and seemed to feel the most entire sympathy in his untimely fate. One word led to another, and as two people who are to sit together

for days on the narrow back seat of a carriage are soon disposed to be confidential, they both related, in the course of the afternoon, their mutual histories, and found that he had procured them their situations on the very same day.

So they drove on, and it was late in the afternoon when they changed horses at an inn in which were many travellers, who were occupied in listening to a harp girl singing all kinds of gay ballads. When the musician heard the sound of the carriage she came out in front of the house, but quickly drew back when she saw the face of the lady in the carriage. She left her harp in one of the rooms, and went out through a back door.

Immediately afterwards Henriette felt some one give her cloak a gentle pull. She turned and looked in the face of her former companion, Nanette, who gave her her hand, laughing, and said, "You see we have both got what we wished. You feel happy in the chains of your service, and I not less so with my harp in the enjoyment of sweet freedom."

The chasseur was not a little surprised to see Nanette, whom he knew well, here, and the girl seemed delighted to meet him again. "There is another old acquaintance of ours here," whispered

she to him—"Matthias, but he is still confined to bed with his wound. He is getting well, but the sad news the landlord of the Fuchsbau privately sent him, that he whom he so dearly loved had come to a miserable end, has thrown him back sadly again."

"Give him my kind regards," answered Franz, "and tell him at the same time that the news he heard is not true. *He* is, alas! no more, but his end was not a miserable one. He died the death of a man of honour and courage."

"That will cheer him," answered the harp girl. "But now farewell! Your horses are put to."

"Farewell," said Henriette and the chasseur, and both kindly pressed Nanette's hands. The latter left his purse with her, and said, "It is for Matthias; he is to take care of himself, and if he can forget the past, and wishes to begin a new life, if he applies to me I may be able to assist him."

The carriage drove on; the chasseur and lady's-maid did not say a word for a long time, but very soon after the inn resounded as before with the gay tones of the harp and singing.

As for the Fuchsbau, whose gloomy walls our gracious reader has often visited with us, it was

bought by government as a house of correction for those female members of society whose private conduct necessitated watchful justice to search into their doings; and we cannot, alas! conceal that, within a year of the time when our story finishes, some of our fair acquaintances had met there, and that Madame Becker, Madame Wundel, and her daughter Emilie no longer enjoyed punch, coffee, and chocolate together, but dry bread and water, and very thin pea-soup. The room, with dark oak panelling, which we may so well remember, belonged to the overseer; but he never liked it. He declared there was something very mysterious about it, and that when he was seated by the fire, with every window and door fast shut, there was a strong current of air, the source of which he could not discover. So he began by avoiding going often into the room, and at last shut it up entirely.

The landlord of the Fuchsbau had been imprisoned and detained for a time, but nothing could be proved against him. He denied every accusation obstinately. Nothing could be said against him except that he gave refuge to many doubtful characters, and was suspected of being a receiver of

stolen goods; and so he got off with six months' imprisonment. He left the prison with a still longer black beard, but visibly thinner.

Herr Strauber did not fare so well. By degrees most of his little whims and fancies came to light. His stealing of pocket-handkerchiefs and other small articles, and his love of the gold earrings of helpless children, would only have given him a couple of years in the house of correction; but as in this world one link is apt to follow another, by degrees the correspondence was discovered which he carried on for Master Schwemmer with regard to the starved, ill-used, and wretched children in his establishment. The connexion between these two worthies was, therefore, more closely examined into, and in the course of these inquiries Herr Strauber could not free himself from the charge of having, in collusion with Madame Schwemmer, hastened the course of nature, and sent the husband of the latter lady to his long account in a hurry. It was in a place of punishment for criminals where one of the silent cells opened its doors to receive Herr Strauber. He was obliged to lay aside for ever the black coat and woollen gloves; his refinement and his gentility disappeared under

the coarse prison dress ; and, as his ambitious spirit would not condescend to use the spinning-machine, the disagreeable consequence was that he was made acquainted with imprisonment in the dark, hunger, and blows—very uncomfortable additions to life in a gaol.

Mademoiselle Therese had danced for the last time on that evening at the theatre when the unhappy Marie had met with so sudden and cruel a fate. She received her dismissal according to her own wish, and bestowed her hand on Herr Berger. That she carried out her resolution to make a very humble slave of her meek husband, the reader may take our word for. She did so in the fullest sense of the word : but Herr Berger seemed rather to like his bondage ; at least, there was a great change for the better in his appearance, and instead of a thin, miserable-looking creature, he became a stout, comfortable gentleman. Therese's good looks and pretty figure remained unchanged.

Their wedding had been solemnised with unusual splendour a few days after Arthur's. Mademoiselle Therese had desired that a certain number of her former colleagues should be present, and she particularly invited Herr Hammer, Richard, and

Schellinger. Fritz, the hairdresser, was not so fortunate as to receive an invitation, but requested to be permitted to dress the hair of the fair bride for the last time, as he said, with a sigh, on her wedding-day. That Therese, in her white satin dress, lace veil, and myrtle wreath, looked like a princess, we can easily imagine. Herr Berger heard, with infinite satisfaction, how much she was admired, and what a fortunate man he was considered. The wedding-dinner was very merry, and there were only two sad faces to be seen there—Richard and Schwindelmann. The latter, almost in tears, complained that he had no longer any pleasure in his duties: “Clara gone—poor Marie dead—and now Mademoiselle Therese deserting us! It is all over with the ballet,” said he; “we shall never again see three such lovely creatures!”

As for Richard, he could scarcely be numbered among the wedding guests, for he came only for a few minutes to congratulate the bride, and to take leave of her and all his friends for ever. He had given up his situation at the theatre, and was going to emigrate to America. “Here I cannot stay,” said he, to Therese, tears filling his eyes; “and as for the theatre, the very sight of its walls oppresses

me like a nightmare, and breaks my heart." There was a great change in the formerly fine, powerful young man. His bright eyes were sunk in his head, his ruddy cheeks were now pale, and he who had formerly been so active and energetic, was now in the habit of standing staring for hours on one spot, gnawing his under-lip. He cordially pressed the bride's hand, spoke some words to old Herr Hammer, and begged Schwindelmann and Schellinger to excuse themselves to the bride for half an hour to go with him.

It was late in the afternoon when the three walked along the streets together. They went on in silence, and at last passed through one of the gates of the city; a hundred paces further on they arrived at an iron grating, through which various crosses and monuments were visible. "Follow me," said Richard; "I know where she lies." So they walked through the graves, and at last came to a little hillock on which stood a simple wooden cross and a wreath of immortals hanging on it. Here the three knelt with folded hands; old Schellinger endeavoured to conceal his grief, but the more tender-hearted Schwindelmann's tears streamed from his eyes. The sky had the whole day been heavy with

dark clouds, which now dispersed a little in the horizon, permitting the glowing evening sun to cast a last brilliant glance on the solitary grave of poor Marie. A light breeze arose, the wreath of immortals rustled faintly, the long grass bent and whispered——

“Amen!” said Richard. He then stooped down, broke off a small branch from the evergreen wreath, and took a handful of earth from the grave. “These shall be placed in my coffin with me hereafter,” said he.

Schwindelmann dried his eyes, and as they were preparing to go he pointed to a neglected grave covered with weeds, and said, “There lies poor Catherine, the sempstress. You may remember her—the poor girl whom I assisted in getting back her child. It is now well taken care of by Herr Arthur Erichsen.”

Richard said, in a hollow voice, “Poor Marie once told me that Catherine said, ‘When I am dead, and you are happily married, then be kind to my child for my sake;’ and now! they both lie here!”

They returned to the city as silently as they had left it, through the dark streets to the inn where the

wedding feast was being celebrated. Here all was brilliantly illuminated, and gay dancing-music resounded in the silent night. "I cannot join them again," said Richard, mournfully. "Tell my father that I will wait for him at home. I will see you too, I hope, once again. I do not go till eleven o'clock, and then this feast will be over." He then went towards his home without looking round.

L'ENVOI.

THE kind readers of a long story like this may be compared to a party of pleasure. At the early dawn, as soon as the city gates are passed through, as in the first chapter of this book, the company of pleasure-seekers are crowded together, but in good order. They eagerly pursue their way along hills and valleys, encounter sunshine or rain, and as the gay beings pass along the highway, or through the shadow of a wood, so bright eyes glance over the first pages of this book with gaiety and good humour. But with many of the wanderers, as well as with our readers, the charm of novelty soon passes away. They look at the path before them, sighing, and the varied objects which display themselves on every side no longer excite their interest. One person thinks the level plain he must cross too.

monotonous, another too varied; one thinks the sun too bright, another dislikes the gloomy clouds which are rising in the distant horizon. He does not admire the faces he meets nor the attire of those to whom they belong: some seem too gaily dressed, too affected, others too much covered with the mud of the path.

The pedestrian sighs wearily on the dusty highway, as does the reader with his book in his hand. He finds comrades who think as he does, and who agree silently to go no further. Many, after the first chapters, skip unceremoniously many pages; and others stop at the first rest—the end of the first volume. Those who have loitered behind, no longer follow the signs of those in front; they lie down here and there in the shade, and as this example is infectious, the loiterers increase as the end of the journey approaches. Many go no further than the close of the second volume. Some look into the third cursorily; but as its commencement does not answer their expectations, they shut it impatiently, and turn away in bad humour. Very few hold out to the end; these few, however, constitute the delight and the reward of the guide, and when he reaches the termination, and also seeks

rest, and glances back at the way he has travelled, he thanks and praises those warmly who have remained with him to the last, apologises for the length of the journey; but says he trusts, even if all has not exactly suited every taste, that each has found something to rejoice his heart, if only a shining pebble, a bright flower, the shade of a leafy wood, or the fresh breeze sweeping over the heather of a spacious moor, or a valley lighted up by the rays of the sun. He then thanks them for their kind sympathy, and assures those who have not forsaken him, that when he next undertakes a pleasure-trip, he will anxiously endeavour to discover a fairer landscape, a more agreeable path, with a greater variety of warmth, cold, sun, rain, dust, damp, light, and shade—a pattern landscape, in which all can choose what they like best, or what is most suitable for them; and these are also my last words to you, my kindly disposed and gracious readers!

THE END.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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